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OST IN THE CROWD

LOST IN THE CROWD;

OR,

Better Broke than Kept.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF 'RECOMMENDED TO MERCY.'

'Hushed on the angel's breast
I saw an infant rest,
Smiling upon the gloomy hell below.
"What is the infant pressed,
O! angel to thy breast?"
"The child God gave me in the Long Ago."
LORD LYTTON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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LOST IN THE CROWD.

CHAPTER I.

'Tis a meaner part of sense
To find a fault than taste an excellence.'
ROCHESTER.

'YOU have visited our country, have you not?' asked Mr. Scobell later in the evening of Mrs. Fielden, to whom he had been introduced by Gerald Mainwaring. 'I think your grandson mentioned that you had been in New Orleans.'

A flush of colour spread, at this sudden query, over the lady's thin cheek, and a sensation almost approaching to alarm kept her momentarily silent. She never, of her own free will, spoke of the sojourn of herself and her husband in the Southern States. Her dread of the discovery by

Gerald of his real parentage had, as time wore on, rather increased than diminished, and this unexpected questioning addressed to her by a countryman of the ill-fated Claudine startled her, as I have said, not a little. Could she have entertained the slightest suspicion of what was passing through the mind of her keen-eyed interlocutor, the perturbation of her spirit would have been increased tenfold.

'I *con*clude, ma'am, that you visited the Crescent City before the "institution" was put an end to?' asked Mr. Scobell.

The lady's hesitation, ere she replied, might have caused him some surprise; but, like the generality of his countrymen, his temperament was 'quick,' and the habit of acquiring information strong within him.

Thus urged, Mrs. Fielden made an effort to recover herself, and replied with tolerable composure that at the time when she and her husband found themselves at New Orleans slavery had not been abolished.

'Ah! it was a fine city in those days,' rejoined the American. 'But you'd find a terrible difference now. I have some recollection of hearing your name once mentioned as an English lady who was stopping in the city with her husband, and if I remember rightly, there was a

younger gentleman—a man of large fortune, it was reported, who had come from Europe with the same party, and who was travelling, like yourselves, for his pleasure——'

'For pleasure and for profit combined—mental profit, I mean,' rejoined Mrs. Fielden, who, in her companion's last remark, saw and caught at an opportunity for changing the conversation. 'There is so much to see, and so much for an intelligent mind to learn in America, that it has become very much the fashion for young Englishmen to visit the United States, and spend a considerable time in making themselves acquainted with your country and its institutions.'

'Your grandson,' remarked the American after a pause, 'has not, he tells me, as yet crossed the Atlantic. He is a fine young fellow, and smart, too, I should say, for an English aristocrat. He has travelled a good deal in Europe, has he not?'

'Yes; both my daughter and her husband were fond of Continental life; had they not been so, it is possible that they would have been with us still. A fever,' she added, in a broken voice, 'which they both caught at Genoa, proved fatal to poor Gerald's parents; but he is a dear, good boy, and has amply rewarded us by his

affection and filial duty for the efforts we have made to supply the places of those of whom he has been deprived.'

'He has followed the example of our young men, and taken a wife betimes,' remarked Mr. Scobell. 'A wise step, if it may be permitted to a middle-aged bachelor to say so, and I can well understand that with so handsome and well-endowed an aspirant as Mr. Mainwaring, *l'embarras du choix*, formed his only difficulty. His must have been a love-match, I conclude, for his wife is very beautiful, and her age, judging from appearances, cannot be more than twenty.'

'Your guess is a tolerably accurate one,' rejoined Mrs. Fielden, who, feeling slightly displeased, as well as not a little surprised by the persistent curiosity of her grandson's guest, endeavoured to repress, by a certain coldness and rigidity of tone, the inquisitorial spirit of her questioner. 'You were well acquainted, were you not, with the Brudenells at Glenwyllt?' she, in her turn adopting the *rôle* of querist, asked of the man who, in her inmost heart, she called her tormentor.

The American, leaning back in his chair, and thrusting his fingers into the armholes of his waistcoat, smiled a little sardonically as he replied:

'I have not the honour, ma'am, of being able to answer your question altogether in the affirmative. Your country-women *air* not in the habit—which demonstrates their prudence—of becoming intimate with persons who *air* only indebted to chance for their introductions. Glenwyllt is, you *air* probably aware, not a place of very fashionable resort, to which circumstance, I *con*clude, I am indebted for the slight acquaintance with Mrs. Brudenell which I can boast of having formed there.'

'But the youngest girl, Rosie, expressed herself as delighted at the prospect of seeing you. She told me how you used to amuse and instruct her by your accounts of African and Asiatic travel. You will admit, I am sure,' Mrs. Fielden added with a smile, 'that you and Miss Rose made at Glenwyllt great progress towards intimacy?'

'I am proud, ma'am, to acknowledge the justice of your remark. Miss Rosie is a fine girl,' said the American, using the adjective, as is the frequent custom with his countrymen, entirely with reference to her moral and mental qualities. 'She's as easy and pleasant as if she'd been raised in Baltimore or New *Orleens*. By the way, ma'am, it strikes me sometimes that Mr. Mainwaring has a look

about him that reminds me of the Southern States. I think, however, that you informed me he had never visited our country.'

'Never!' replied Mrs. Fielden distinctly, though her pale cheek again flushed, and she took bitter shame to herself for the quibble of which she had been guilty.

'But I see my husband beckoning to me,' she continued, as, rising with trembling limbs from her chair (for, in truth, her courage was well nigh spent), she walked slowly away from the neighbourhood of her persecutor.

On that night, after their guests had retired to rest, Gerald Mainwaring made the discovery that the wife whose disposition had hitherto seemed so sweet and yielding, had what is called a will of her own.

Vinca had dismissed her maid, and was sitting over her dressing-room fire, cosily wrapped in a *peignoir* of quilted grey silk, *faced* with crimson satin, when Gerald's languid step—he having just emerged, together with sundry of his male guests, from the smoking-room—made itself heard in the adjoining chamber. The young wife's spirit had been throughout the evening chafed by the 'American manners,' as she now superciliously called them, of Mr. Scobell, and by that she deemed his over-familiarity with her

sister Rosie. When speaking of him to her mother, she had (partly through a spirit of opposition, and partly for the reason that the memory of his reputation as a daring explorer had thrown a halo over the—to her thinking—objectionable points in his behaviour and conversation) boldly justified herself in that she had consented to receive the American (with whom in less palmy days they had condescended to be intimate) at Wroxbourne Abbey. But her view of the matter was altered now, and when Gerald, in obedience to a summons, spoken in tones a trifle less dulcet than her normal ones, entered from the dressing-room, she, without delay or circumlocution, accosted him as follows:

'Do you know, Gerald, I am thoroughly disappointed in your friend, Mr. Scobell. If I had guessed what he would be like when one came to know him better, I would never have encouraged you to ask him here. At Pau, and afterwards at Schaffhausen, he did not seem half so ungainly, so ill-dressed, and so apt as he is now to say the wrong thing.'

Gerald, who was feeling rather tired, not only with a somewhat hard day's shooting, but with the still more trying duties which, as a host, devolved upon him to perform, had thrown himself wearily on a comfortable arm-chair; and

longing as he did for the balmy slumbers which are the meet rewards of toil, Vinca's severe remarks upon a guest whom he, Gerald, had welcomed gladly, and whom his wife had hitherto professed to like, surprised and troubled him not a little. In a few moments, however, he was wide awake, and ready, in chivalrous fashion, to lay lance in rest for the 'stranger that was within his gates.'

'I am very sorry, Pet,' he said, raising himself on his elbows, for well he knew that a reclining posture was a terrible encourager of somnolency; 'more sorry than I can tell you, that you are disappointed in Mr. Scobell, for I find him capital company, as indeed do all the other men whom we have asked to meet him. He even drew Lord Strathcarron out of his shell, and that, let me tell you, is no easy matter. As for his dress——'

'Oh, that is the last thing that signifies! I dislike his attitudes, and his horrible Republican talk; but even that is not so bad as his manner to Rosie. So familiar and confidential! If he had any tact, too, he would avoid talking about that odious boarding-house altogether.'

'But, darling, you must remember that *he* sees nothing to be ashamed of in having lived in it for a month. On the contrary, he evidently

looks back to the time he spent there with both pride and pleasure. He told me, poor fellow, that he was grateful to Balmoral House for having made him acquainted with your family. I really think, my Pet,' he added, after a pause, 'that if you were to try to think better of him, you would do so—I mean as to his peculiarities—for Scobell's real worth is incontestable. You must own, dear, that you have heard nothing of him but what is good?'

'Certainly I have not; but what is the use of goodness in a country house? What people want is to be amused; and, excepting in a particular sort of way, Mr. Scobell is not, in my opinion, either amusing or ornamental. He would not do at all with the Duarts and their set, and, dear Gerald,' she continued coaxingly, 'you know you promised that I should have *just* the party I wished for to meet them when they came.'

'And so you shall, my sweet one; but as they are due in five days, I do not see how we can help your *bête noir*—and I am truly sorry that you should have taken such a dislike to him—being here when they arrive.'

'Oh, but it must not be!' she eagerly exclaimed, as she sprang from her chair and perched herself on the arm of the one occupied by her husband. 'Say it shall not,' she whis-

pered softly, as her cheek touched his, and her pliant wrist was passed round his neck. 'You will never refuse me this small favour?' and the limpid blue eyes were raised to his beseechingly.

'Have I ever yet said "No," my precious child, to any wish of yours?' and as he spoke he pressed, with a lover's passionate tenderness, her white hand to his lips. 'But in this case I do not see— But pshaw! I cannot temporize in the matter—I *know* that, without rudeness, without being false to all the laws of hospitality and gentlemanlike conduct, I cannot cut short the visit of our American guest. He was asked for a fortnight's stay, and a fortnight, I grieve for your sake, my darling, to say, he must remain.'

'As you please,' said Vinca, with a composure which to shortsighted Gerald was very reassuring; but the tumult in her breast was great, and to submit patiently to the inevitable was as far as possible from her thoughts.

Slowly she placed on the velvet pile carpet the small stockingless feet, from one of which the pretty blue satin slipper (swansdown lined) had fallen, and, as she stood for a few minutes contemplating her fair face in the mirror above the mantelshelf, she remembered that Lord Arthur

Clayton was amongst the coming guests, and a smile which had in it something of unholy triumph passed over her features. She loved her husband well, but this was the first time that his will had clashed with hers, and the spoiled beauty felt not only wrathful in that she had, with all her winning ways, failed to move him from the path of duty, but there lurked within her breast a fixed resolve to—if she could by any means effect her purpose—cut short the visit of the American.

She wondered, as she lay awake on her luxurious couch, with unsuspecting Gerald sleeping the slumber of the just beside her, how she could ever have liked that gaunt, outspoken Transatlantic traveller.

'I suppose,' she said to herself, 'it was hearing about his killing the wild beasts and saving somebody's life from a tiger. But that's nonsense; all men are courageous, and they like nothing so well as killing some creature or other. Any way, and howsoever, as Mr. Scobell would remark, I may "fix it," go he must; for if the Duarts or Lady Oldham were to hear him talking about the Glenwyllt boarding-house—the greasy broth and the monster beefsteak puddings—I should die no other death.'

And having thus decided, the mistress of

beautiful Wroxbourne Abbey, and the idolized wife of a good and true-hearted man, turned her head restlessly upon the pillow from which one crumpled rose-leaf, the outcome of vanity and folly, banished the 'beauty sleep' which Vinca had hitherto rarely courted in vain.

CHAPTER II.

> 'Hoping, for my excuse, 'twill be confest,
> That of two evils I have chose the best."
>
> PRIOR.

VINCA was slightly annoyed to find that she could not, without a certain quickening of the pulses and a momentary rise of colour in her cheeks, contemplate her first meeting—after so long a period of separation—with the 'conqueror hero,' whose coming, as a guest of her own, was an event now near at hand. Again and again she told herself that the man whose once-believed-in love had in days gone by been precious to her as rubies, was now an object to her of indifference. She could not banish from her memory the time when, had he but said *the word*, had he whispered in her ear the lovers' prayer—'Be mine, my sweet one—poverty with thee is better than the world's wealth without thee,' she would (and ah! how thankful is she *now* that the temptation

to give up 'all for love' had never, with its maddening hopes, its soul-entrancing visions of future bliss, assailed her) have flung herself upon the breast of the adored one and sobbed out there her promise to be his.

Happily, however, for this luxury-loving and carefully-brought-up young person, the 'adored one' had, as we have seen, not only his wits about him, but was also fortunate enough to be encased in the cold armour of selfishness and worldly prudence. His admiration for the beautiful girl whose heart he had won, and into whose cheek his gaze of passionate admiration had power to call the shy sudden blushes which told their own tale of love unspoken, was great, and it is not too much to say that he was, whilst the hot fever lasted, capable of making some sacrifices in order to possess himself of the prize he coveted. For instance, there were moments when he told himself that if—instead of being, as was actually the case, utterly portionless—Vinca had possessed but a few thousand pounds—twenty perhaps, or even fifteen—he might be induced to sacrifice his liberty for her sake. He had rarely longed for anything in his life as he longed for this girl whose beauty was so fresh, so fair, and so luxuriant, and who loved him, as he doubted not, with the depth of passionate

devotion such as he fondly believed himself to be capable of inspiring in the female breast. But for all that, so it was, he could bring himself to make no sacrifices in order to obtain her! He had seen, he was perpetually reminding himself, enough and to spare of the domestic misery which a narrow income entails upon its luckless possessor. One of his sisters —the best mentally endowed amongst them, and the least personally attractive—had made what is called a 'poor match,' and fastidious Lord Arthur had only to call to mind the undersized, scrubby-looking 'indoors man' hurrying with his coat half on to Mr. Templeton Law's door in Walton Street, when he (milady's brother) did her the somewhat rare honour to call, for a sudden chill to creep over his feelings towards Vinca. The man who had lived to the age of thirty-five so entirely on what, for want of a more succinct and terse expression, I may term the 'fat of the land,' could not be expected to put up with the lean. What would have been luxuries hitherto almost undreamt-of to Vinca Brudenell, were as mere every-day necessaries of life to her lover, and those necessaries he was one of the last men living to feel any inclination to forego.

He had not heard, selfish and world-hardened

although he was, the intelligence of Vinca's approaching marriage without a tightening of the heart-strings which was near akin to regret. He had known that such an event must of necessity take place, and had felt certain, long before even Vinca had quite made sure of her conquest, that Gerald Mainwaring's whole heart had passed into her keeping. Well! better so, he felt, than that a man of his own age and standing—one of his own set, in short—should have thrown prudence to the winds, and whilst Gerald was letting 'I *will* not, wait upon I would,' have carried off the prize. Mainwaring was an outsider, accepted, of course, because of his wealth and by reason of the large settlements which one so gullable, and so well endowed would doubtless make upon his bride. Lord Arthur drew considerable satisfaction from his firm belief that the girl—the depths of whose heart *he* had sounded—could not do more than, in young lady parlance, 'care for' the man whom she would promise, at the altar, to love, honour, and obey. Mainwaring was a handsome fellow, *that* no one could deny, and good-hearted, and all that sort of thing; but a woman like Vinca Mainwaring wanted something more than good looks and good temper to satisfy her heart and intellect. Gerald had, in fact, something of the boy about

him still, and Clayton's experience had taught him that girls of Vinca's temperament did not, as a rule, appreciate anything so young and unworld-taught as the man to whom her fate was linked.

It was thus that the lover who had let his chances 'slide' endeavoured, after the marriage actually took place, to reconcile himself to the inevitable. For a short while envyings, jealousies, and regrets disturbed his mind, and more than once kept him sleepless on his pillow. But it was not in the nature either of 'things' or of the man for this state of feeling to continue. Existence was, for this spoiled child of prosperity, far too rich in varied pleasures for him to waste its precious moments in useless self-reproaches and repinings. It was and ever had been Arthur Clayton's 'way' to make the most, whilst they lasted, of the shining hours which were given him to enjoy. To 'keep moving' along pleasure's path was with him as a very necessity of his being. Fresh temptations, newer faces, keen excitements, met him at every turn, and thus it followed that, long before Vinca could have believed such a consummation possible, the vision of her lovely face and perfect figure had well-nigh faded from his mind and memory.

The invitation to Wroxbourne had been given

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by Gerald. The two men had accidentally met at the Great Northern station, whither Vinca's husband had betaken himself in order to see with his own eyes that two lately purchased and high-priced hunters were safely placed in their travelling boxes. Lord Arthur, accompanied by a gentlemanly-looking man, whose age might be a year or two in advance of his own, was standing on the departure platform, when Gerald, suddenly catching sight of his former acquaintance, advanced with outstretched hand, and cordially invited him to the Abbey.

'We expect rather a pleasant party about the 30th,' he said, 'and there are a few pheasants left to knock over. Mrs. Mainwaring will be as delighted as I shall be to see you. We were always so sorry *just* to miss you abroad.'

'Ah, yes; it was unfortunate—quite like a fatality. When I read your names in the hotel-books, I was invariably told that you had just gone. Thanks—yes; I think I could manage a day or two, and I should like to accept of all things, only—ah! time's up, I see; where can Beverley be? Here you are, old fellow; we shall be late, by Jove! Certainly, I will write'—this to Gerald from the carriage-window, as the long train of vehicles began to move slowly onwards—'and you must present my kind regards

to Mrs. Mainwaring, and say what pleasure it will give me to pay her a few days' visit.'

'What a deuced good-looking fellow that is!' remarked Sir Charles Beverley, as, seated opposite to his friend, he began cutting open with his railway-ticket the pages of the *Globe*. 'He was pointed out to me once in London, and I thought I had never seen a handsomer face. No swagger about him either, but a good fellow, according to all accounts, down to the ground. Do you think of going to his place?' he added, looking up from his paper, and evidently bent on being answered.

'Perhaps; but *cela depend*,' rejoined the other carelessly. 'I must find out who is going, and what the *cuisine* is like. Theirs is a young and inexperienced *ménage*, and it does not do to run any unnecessary risks. The art of making a country house pleasant is not given to everyone, and I have known the best intentions fatally frustrated by ignorance and want of tact.'

So spoke the man, the announcement of whose possible acceptance of her husband's invitation had set Mrs. Mainwaring's heart beating a trifle more quickly than she would have liked that same husband to imagine possible. And he? Well, for all his seeming indifference and composure, he was in reality not by any means

insensible to the prospective charm of seeing again the girl whose heart was once, as his vanity had often whispered to him, all his own. He would accept—not with too much *empressement*, for that would be, in his opinion, a mistake, but with the accustomed well-bred courtesy which is due from one somewhat slight acquaintance to another—the invitation which Gerald had, with the impulsive hospitality that formed part of his character, given to the experienced man of the world, of whose habits and principles he knew so little.

CHAPTER III.

'The blood within her crystal cheekes,
Did such a colour drive,
As though the lillye and the rose
For mastership did strive.'

Percy Relics.

A GOOD deal to Vinca's relief, she found that when the almost dreaded event actually came off, she took the meeting with her lover without much perturbation of spirit, and, as she flattered herself, without the slightest betrayal of emotion. Fortunately, the surrounding circumstances were decidedly—as regarded an unemotional encounter—favourable enough. An omnibus and four had been sent to Fellsborough—a distance of seven miles—for the purpose of bringing from the railway station Lord and Lady Duart, a Mr. and Mrs. M'Naughten, and their pretty daughter Katie, together with—last, but far from least in importance—Lord Arthur Clayton. With the two former, Vinca's quondam *soupirant* had been

previously acquainted, and with the lively Irish girl and her parents something very like intimacy had, before the travellers found themselves a quarter of a mile on their road to Wroxbourne, commenced.

They were received in the most delicious of light literature libraries. A room where witty (or otherwise) nonsense might be talked as well as read, and within the walls of which the silver ring of women's laughter, and the subdued murmur of their well-trained voices, seemed fitting and appropriate sounds.

'Why have you never permitted us to have tea here before?' asked Dora Majendie of her hostess, who was 'presiding' at the afternoon tea-table, while the much-beringed fingers of the said Dora were busily engaged with her own well-filled Sèvres china cup. 'It is so much cosier and prettier than the big blue drawing-room, and with books round one, I, for my part, always feel at home.'

'What? Even if you have not yet made acquaintance with them?' Mr. Scobell was, in his dry way, beginning, when Vinca, who rarely lost an opportunity of snubbing her former boarding-house acquaintance, cut his inquiry short by a curt reply to Miss Majendie's question.

'I keep this room as a place of refuge from bores,' she said slowly. 'There are some of the genus who, for various reasons, must be invited to the house, but I generally contrive to keep them out of this *sanctum.* As long as the Carmichaels were here, the blue drawing-room (your inanimate *bête noir*, Dora) was necessarily in use; but as they took their departure this morning, and as the weeding out has at least commenced, I have shown a spirit of toleration, and here we are.'

Whether or not there would have been any rejoinder to this not only slightly ambiguous, but decidedly suggestive speech, cannot now be known; for almost before the last word thereof had been uttered, the door was thrown open, and the names of the newly-arrived guests were in due order and sonorously announced.

'How good of you to come so far to see us!' exclaimed Vinca, as she and Lady Duart embraced each other as warmly as if the latter had not held the Colonel's widow at more than arm's length for years.

'Not at all, my dear, we are delighted! And what a lovely place this is! We had heard, of course, of the beauties of Wroxbourne, but really—oh! Mr. Mainwaring, I did not see you at first, coming out of comparative darkness into

this brilliant light, you know. Yes, thank you. I think I will go up to my room. The journey has been rather fatiguing, and if I am allowed to ask for a cup of tea upstairs——'

'Certainly; you have only to ring; but you must first let me show you your room,' and Vinca, who had been bestowing hurried greetings both on her Irish cousins and on Lord Arthur Clayton, now left these less important guests to the temporary care of her 'people.'

Mrs. Brudenell and Mabel proved quite equal to the occasion. The widow was in her element in a crisis like the present. She prided herself on her powers of causing, by the magic of her genial manner and lissome tongue, an assembly even of strangers to feel at their ease. And these were not strangers, but, on the contrary, two of them were 'blood' relations, and the other a friend with whom both she and her now prosperous, highly-considered daughter had in former days been on such intimate and delightful terms. Lord Duart, her late husband's second cousin, was a dull, although a marvellously well-informed man, and, moreover, one who, if the laws of exclusion from the room in which the present company were assembled had been strictly enforced, would never have found entrance therein. To him and to Mr. McNaughten, who

was a good-humoured, but somewhat obtrusive specimen of his countrymen, Gerald was 'doing the agreeable,' whilst Mr. Scobell was standing near, silently wondering at the conjunction of two such widely opposite characters as the 'noble pair' who had just put in an appearance had instantaneously struck him as being. In his own mind—and the Virginian gentleman was a quick reader of character—he had pronounced her ladyship to be noisy, overbearing, and underbred; whilst Lord Duart, on the contrary, had struck this keen observer of men and things as being one of the least pretentious, if not indeed one of the liveliest, specimens of his kind that it had ever been his (Mr. Scobell's) lot to meet with.

When Vinca, after performing with an *empressement* suited to the greatness of the occasion her duties as hostess, returned to the 'south library,' she found everything going on smoothly. Mrs. McNaughten, a well-preserved matron of forty, was chatting over her welcome cup of tea, with Mr. Scobell as the listener to her travelling discomfitures, whilst Katie was looking beamingly happy, with Lord Arthur administering to her requirements and smiling at her lively sallies. At that moment Vinca, noting the lively demeanour of her ardent admirer of former days,

felt as thoroughly convinced as her best wishers could desire her to be, that the love to which she had fondly trusted, and with greedy ears drunk in, had been simply a counterfeit of love. This was as it should be, and she was therefore enabled on her return to respond with apparently light-hearted composure to Lord Arthur's cheerful platitudes.

'Miss McNaughten and I have fraternised, you see, already,' he said. 'Your roomy, easy-going omnibus is a capital place for making acquaintance in. There could be no mutual doubts as to respectability and that kind of thing, so we all, with one exception at least'—and summoning up an expressive glance, he nodded his head towards Lord Duart—'forbore to treat one another as though we were, one and all, possible pickpockets or swindlers.'

'Ah, now then, what an idear!' laughed Katie, while in the soft southern brogue she, with the utter guilelessness of an Irish girl who has never disported herself in a *Dublin* ball-room, continued, without thought either of *self* or of consequences, to elicit frequent evidences of amusement from her companion.

Lord Arthur need have felt no fear of being either 'poisoned' by the indifferent culinary arrangements, or 'bored to extinction' by want

of *savoir faire* either in the host or hostess of Wroxbourne. He had not passed two days under the roof which now sheltered the woman whom he *might* have married, before he felt thoroughly convinced that no *maitresse de maison* could better understand the art of making her house a pleasant one. She possessed plenty of taste, and no inconsiderable amount of that craving after popularity which sometimes does useful duty for, and is often mistaken for, genuine kindness of heart. She devoted herself very successfully to the comfort and enjoyment of her guests, and this not because to afford them pleasure gave any happiness to herself, but simply for the reason that it was agreeable to be smiled upon and gratifying to be talked of and complimented as the perfection of a *chatelaine* and as the gifted purveyor of daily gratification and enjoyment.

'Nothing can be better than the whole thing,' wrote Lord Arthur to an intimate and confiding friend, the which friend was waiting for *his* correspondent's account of Wroxbourne before paving the way for an invitation on his own account from Gerald Mainwaring and his wife. 'A first-rate *chef*—lots of game, and no *gêne*, or home 'rules' of any kind whatever. I was never in a house more thoroughly and deliciously

warmed, and *that*, with the kind of weather we are having now, is, you will allow, a blessing to be thankful for. The Duarts are here; *she* as magnificent, and he as insignificant, as usual. She certainly contrives to make the most of a style of beauty which to me is the least attractive of any which I have ever happened to come across; but she should really abstain from lifting up her voice in song. When she doled forth, "Oh, then remember me!" last night, the pathos was so more than counterbalanced by the ridiculous, that, happening to catch the eye of a jolly little Irish girl who sings ballads and love-songs divinely, we had some difficulty in keeping decorously serious. There is an American here with whom old Duart is becoming rather thick. He is evidently, for some reason or other, no favourite with our hostess, who snubs him as much as she ventures to do, for there is something in the fellow's eye, as well as in an occasional prick of a somewhat sharp tongue, which evidently keeps her in order.'

The letter, of which we have here given a portion, was written previously to a conversation which, chiefly on the subject of Mr. Scobell, Vinca had, some few days after the arrival of Lord Arthur, taken an opportunity of having with that fastidious gentleman. She did not feel

the least afraid of finding herself *tête-à-tête* with him now, a fact of which he was well aware; and the truth that so it was, added to the daily contemplation of charms which, since the days of her maidenhood, had ripened into still greater perfection, and had decoyed him again—an ardent, though silent, adorer—to her shrine.

'Yes, I think it is nice. The trees and the old house—not exactly grand, you know, or stately, but thoroughly comfortable and home-like.'

Lord Arthur and the tall, regal-looking woman, who was like, and yet how unlike, the scarcely yet fully developed girl with whom he had somewhat less than three years before so vigorously flirted and *philandered*, were slowly pacing to and fro the lofty entrance-hall, along and upon the walls of which effigies of men in complete armour, together with not a few trophies of the chase, were artistically placed.

It was a cold, ungenial afternoon. Showers of mingled sleet and rain were occasionally falling, and Lord Arthur had taken advantage of a very evidently real threatening of bronchitis to excuse himself from joining the shooting-party. The lady guests had, after luncheon, variously disposed of themselves, and Vinca having declared herself in favour of indoor exercise, she

and her companion were taking what they were pleased to call a 'constitutional' in the hall. Mrs. Mainwaring's 'faint praise' of her beautiful home was in response to sundry remarks of Lord Arthur's on the general charm and delightfulness of Wroxbourne; and if the lady had been only one degree less winsome and attractive, he would have been not a little amused by the offhand and almost deprecatory manner in which she, to whom lodging and boarding houses had, in the days of her youth, been far more familiar than 'parks' or 'castles,' spoke of the 'stately home' which by marriage had become hers.

'It is all you say, and far more,' he rejoined. 'I shall always think of Wroxbourne as the most enjoyable of all possible places. And your guests! I am amazingly pleased with them——'

'*Amazingly!* I hope,' laughing, 'you did not expect them to be savages?'

'Indeed, no. The Duarts——'

'Yes, to be sure. You knew the Duarts of course before. But not that horrid Mr. Scobell, who, I have been told, calls *her* vulgar. Only fancy, he says all people who are by way of being *fine* are underbred. But tell me,' raising her speaking blue eyes to his face, 'what is your opinion of *him?* I shall not be surprised to hear

that he has sometimes rather surprised you. Now, you must not answer in a hurry, for I really want to know whether he puzzles you or not.'

'*Really?* Well,' with a laugh, 'I am afraid I must confess with shame (for it is a clear case of absence of perspicacity, seeing that I have heard him praised as being what the French call *tout rond*) that I cannot make Mr. Scobell out.'

'No more can I, and that is one reason why I dislike, and wish him away from Wroxbourne. He has no tact either whatever, and the way that he has fastened upon Gerald, keeping, as it seems to me, a sort of watch over him, annoys me considerably. And then his pretended intimacy—for I am sure it must be pretended, although she certainly writes to him—with Princess Wolkersdorf, is another mystery. From what Lady Duart, who has met her abroad, says, she is the last person in the world to take up with a rough American Republican like this Mr. Scobell.'

'The very last—I, who have, however, only a very slight acquaintance with her—should say. I happened to meet her at Aix, where her daughter was taking the baths. For some very slight complaint probably, as Princess Dacia, for so she was called, did not strike anyone as looking in the slightest degree delicate.'

'And her name is Dacia,' murmured Vinca. 'Classic, I suppose, but odd. But tell me,' she added after a pause, 'are they both, mother as well as daughter, so very lovely as people say they are?'

'Incontestably so; but, my dear Mrs. Mainwaring,' he added, laughing, and with a glance that was pregnant with meaning, 'you must not, however, forget that this young lady is fifteen at the very least, and that——'

'Oh, I was thinking of no absurdity of that kind!' Vinca a trifle scornfully rejoined. 'But,' she continued musingly, 'as, by all accounts, this lovely Principessa does not look more than twenty-three, the child is very likely not her own daughter. There is a mystery, you know, by all accounts, surrounding them.'

'And in that case——?'

The blush which at this question spread itself over Vinca's lovely face was due far more to the intensity of her companion's gaze than to any inner consciousness—any latent suspicion, or jealousy, as regarded the bachelor loves of her husband. She was angry with herself in that she could not support, without the tell-tale colour rising to her very brow, the glance—so eloquent of passionate admiration—with which her former lover had dared to regard her. She was tolerably

happy in her married life, and if neither husband nor child were quite as dear to her as they should have been, she was not—in the secret depths of her spirit—aware of the slightest craving after the dangerous excitements which coquetry and flirtation afford; it was, therefore, not a little provoking that Lord Arthur should have been by Nature's own mistake induced to flatter himself that his admiration was still so highly valued. That he did so flatter himself was soon —to Vinca's annoyance—proved.

Stopping short in the middle of their lingering walk, he, in a low, tender whisper, says:

'You have been very sparing both of looks and words to me since I have been your guest; must I therefore conclude that you have quite forgotten the old happy days in Graye Street?'

She has by this time recovered her self-possession, and her complexion having resumed its normal blush-rose tint, she can say calmly:

'Yes, Lord Arthur, I *have* forgotten them, and if you wish to contribute to my happiness, you also will banish them from your memory.'

'Never! You may lay your commands upon my words—my conduct; but thought is free, and whilst I live, the recollection of the hours which we passed together, before another——'

But here a voice, suddenly calling, in their

near neighbourhood, upon 'Vinca,' arrested his words. It was Rosie's eager shout, and any further *tête-à-tête* was rendered by it impossible.

'You must come directly,' she said, 'and take part with Dennis McNaughten against Mr. Scobell. They are having quite a flare up about politics, and that kind of thing; and it is all Mabel's fault. She talked so stupidly about her being afraid of the Queen—at a drawing-room, you know—and then Mr. Scobell began. I am sure I wish they had stayed out shooting, for who cares about taxes and tenant-right, and all that sort of stupid thing?'

They had by this time reached the drawing-room, from the open door of which the sound of laughter and of many voices was issuing.

'Hear them!' laughed Rosie. 'We are only just in time to prevent them coming to blows. Mr. Scobell'—to the American, who is standing on the rug, looking, in Lord Arthur's opinion, not a little pugnacious—'here is Vinca come to keep the peace; and now, repeat what you have just said to *us*, if you dare.'

CHAPTER IV.

'Leave this keen encounter of our wits,
And fall somewhat into a slower method.'
SHAKESPEARE.

THE curiosity of Lord Arthur Clayton concerning his American fellow-guest was considerable. As he had confessed to Mrs. Mainwaring, he could not 'make' the Transatlantic stranger 'out.' Were it only from the circumstance of his continuing (unwelcome as he evidently was to his hostess) to be a visitor at Wroxbourne, Lord Arthur would have found matter for surprise. But there was more than this: a curious and almost suspicious watchfulness seemed in Mr. Scobell's keen dark eyes to be unsleeping, and this was especially noticeable when Gerald Mainwaring was either present, or when his antecedents, habits, or character happened to be under discussion.

But for this same curiosity on the American's

part, Lord Arthur would have simply pronounced him to be a disputatious and unpolished bore, and would have troubled himself no more about him. In the case, also, of his own highly interesting *tête-à-tête* with Vinca having been interrupted by reason of the Virginian gentleman's pugnacity, it was only the hope that some light might thereby be thrown upon the mystery which surrounded the man that reconciled the lady's disappointed admirer to the 'situation.' 'The fellow may in some way or other commit himself,' was his inward reflection; and therefore it was that, without delay, but with no inconsiderable exercise of forbearance, he followed Rosie into the drawing-room.

It was Mabel—who was, according to her sister, the original cause of the dispute—who undertook, and that with no little eagerness, the task of spokeswoman.

'Now, Vinca,' she began, 'just listen to what Mr. Scobell has been saying. He declares that for a "free-born woman" to be so frightened as to turn sick when the head of the State stands to be made a courtesy to by her, is a degradation and a humiliation which no "American female" would be so poor-spirited as to undergo.'

'Those are about my words, Miss Mabel,' said the American, whose powerful shoulders were

leaning against the mantelshelf, whilst his thumbs were in their usual resting-places—namely, the arm-holes of his waistcoat. 'I do declare that when I read in the English papers of one young lady who was so terrified at sight of the Queen that if she had taken a dose of ipecac. she couldn't have been worse, I felt like blushing for the old country. And then there were a lot of gurls who'd been told off to give *pusses* to that sweet young woman the Princess of Wales, and, if we are to believe the papers, they were all in such an almighty funk that they skedaddled, *pusses* and all. You may call that British loyalty, if you please; but I say there must be something rotten in the state of Denmark, or women with English blood in their veins couldn't disgrace themselves like that.'

'And I say,' rejoined Mr. McNaughten, who in his bachelor days had been a 'Castle' aide-de-camp, and who honoured real as well as sham royalty accordingly, 'that it is the feeling which you call "awe" that causes the English people to be the most loyal upon the face of the earth. Whilst other countries are revolutionized, and other crowns not only totter but fall, that of England remains upon—upon its monarch's head, and our glorious Constitution stands firm against the blast. I'd be sorry, for me own part, to see

the day when respect for the Sovereign would be diminished by a ha'p'orth!'

In his enthusiasm in a cause so great as that which he was advocating, Mr. McNaughten became considerably more 'Irish' than was his wont, and a laugh, in which he was the first to join, followed his peroration. When it had subsided, his adversary said quietly:

'I am all for respecting those in authority. We don't fail in that towards our Presidents, for all we don't pay them a twenty-fifth part of the yearly salary that you give to your head of the State; but we take care that, for what he receives from our great country, he does his work well. No, gentlemen,' he continued, straightening himself up, and with one elevated finger emphasizing his words; 'what I say is this: it's the wrong *names* which have somehow got stuck to *things*, that have played the dickens with you English in this matter. Why, your Sovereign ain't got anything like the power which the President of the United States has; and just fancy—Lord! the very idea of it makes one *larf*—our fifty millions of people being called his *subjects!* Why, he's as much subject to the laws as you and I are, and as is the Queen herself, for the matter of that!'

'Of course. We all know that. It is only a

mode of speech, and we are perfectly well aware that *le nom ne fait rien à la chose.*'

'But I maintain that it does *make* something, and that the wrong words being put in the wrong place have much to answer for. By speaking and writing of "the Queen's army," "her Majesty's ship" so-and-so, "the Queen's volunteers," etc., etc., etc., as if they were the Sovereign's own personal possessions, a false and mischievous idea of the royal power and prerogative is given, and that idea causes, in a great measure, that grovelling awe of the head of the State, and that stupid and vulgar craving after the sight of even the little finger of royalty, which is a disgrace to, and a standing joke against, the English people.'

A suggestive silence follows for a few moments on this speech—a silence which is first broken by a whisper, audible to many, from Mrs. Mainwaring to her youngest sister:

'I really think,' she says irritably, and in her excitement totally forgetful of the effect which her words may, and indeed *do*, produce on her late companion—'I really think, Rosie, that for such nonsense as this it was not worth while to make such a fuss. It *could* give us no pleasure to listen to Mr. Scobell's Republican rhodomontades. But, by the way, where is Lady Duart?'

'Oh, she went away with her nose in the air directly the row began, and it was such fun that I thought you would like to hear it. Cissy was frightened, and thought that they would come to fisticuffs; but Katie was delighted——'

'Irish to the backbone!' interpolated Lord Arthur; and he would have continued to playfully *chaff* Miss Katie on her national propensity for strife had not the American's sonorous voice —a voice which had the gift of commanding attention—again made itself heard.

'Another blessed change,' he said; 'for the British people, would be the approximation in their royal receptions to the modes of more liberal countries than this is. Why, what a deal of trouble and bother it would save, if the ladies, instead of bending their knees to King or Queen (which I own it would go against the grain with me to see a daughter or wife of mine do), were to stand in a row, as they do in Belgium and Italy—and in Greece too, for aught I know—and make a pretty courtesy as the sovereign walks by. Our President, he shakes hands when he receives at the White House, but I suppose that would be too much condescension for a crowned head. I'm proud to say, though, that I've had a grip from the fists of two as honest and as fine men—they being Presidents of our country—as

ever stepped; but then, you see, we have the pick of our citizens for the office, and we take those who have proved themselves most worthy of the trust we place in them.'

It was by a far softer and pleasanter voice than any which had yet spoken that the short pause which followed on the Virginian's last words was broken; for Gerald Mainwaring had, during his friend's peroration, noiselessly entered the room, and now said, in the quiet, languid manner which was one of his *national* peculiarities:

'There is one British institution, at least, Scobell, which I have reason to think you thoroughly respect, and that is, the institution of afternoon tea! What say you all? Shall we make tracks for the south library, where the "cup that cheers without inebriating" awaits our coming? But, by-the-way, where is Lady Duart? She generally comes to the front at the hour when the repast of herbs is to be enjoyed.'

'Oh!' exclaims Rosie, as the entire party, in obedience to Gerald's summons, commence their adjournment to the tea-room 'she has retreated upstairs, and Vinca has gone to bring her down.' And then to Katie she added in a half-whisper, Such nonsense of Gerald, calling tea and bread and butter *herbs*.'

'Well, but, my dear young lady,' says the American, who has overheard the comment, and who, as a rule, appears to make the upholding of his host's opinions a part of his daily duty, 'the food of which he spoke does not certainly belong to any other than the vegetable kingdom, and we all know (and I to a certain extent agree with) his opinions in regard to a carnivorous diet.'

'Yes,' laughs Rosie, 'he always declares that people would be more merciful to each other—would, in short, love one another better—if they ate less of the stalled ox in which the British public so much delight. He eats scarcely any meat himself, and never seems to require it——'

'A peculiarity,' put in Sir Everard Coleman, 'which I have noticed in those whose origin can be traced to a parentage indigenous in tropical climates; but there can be no reasonable doubt of the fact that the inhabitants of colder countries need animal food to keep them in health and strength.'

The glance which on the conclusion of Sir Everard's sententious remark was thrown by Mr. Scobell at the master of the house would have struck any person on the watch for discoveries as one not lightly charged with meaning. Gerald had drawn his chair as closely as possible to the

fire, and although the room was—in the opinion of most of those present—quite sufficiently warmed, it was noticeable, and more specially observed by the American, that the advocate for a vegetable diet shivered slightly as he held his delicately-formed fingers to the blaze.

Meanwhile Lady Duart, in the luxurious apartment which has been set apart for her use, is giving vent to the hatred she entertains of the opinions and manners of her Transatlantic fellow guest.

'My dear, he is not a gentleman, none of those Yankees are, and he ought not to be listened to. Fancy his saying that the Queen, when she opens Parliament, ought not to say "*my* people" and "*my* armies" and "*my* ships!" I never heard such low Radical nonsense talked before.'

'He is a tremendously strong Republican, which we had no idea of till he came; but,' Vinca ventured to add, 'he is very much thought of—because of his large fortune, I suppose—in his own country.'

'Pshaw! His own country! Who cares anything about that in England? I think his venturing to speak about the Queen as he did ought to be severely punishable. Why, he said it was a shame to allow her the prerogative of making war!'

'Well, but Lady Duart, though I agree with you that it is not for a Yankee to dictate to us, I must say that I have heard many sensible Englishmen object to *that.* They say that an unprincipled minister who is bent on war may contrive to elude the check which the House of Commons——'

'Oh, my dear, don't talk to me of the House of Commons! I hate the very name of it! A horrid Revolutionary, Republican lot. Just such men as is that Mr. Snowball, or whatever his name may be, downstairs. I wonder—I really do—and you mustn't mind my speaking plainly, how Mr. Mainwaring can endure his presence in the house.'

Vinca had what is called a 'high spirit of her own,' and from any other guest than Lady Duart she would have borne but ill—personally obnoxious although the American was to herself—the lecture which she had just received. Even as the case stood, she, being tenacious of her own rights as mistress of the house, as well as susceptible on the score of her husband's dignity and *prestige,* found some little difficulty in keeping back the angry words which rose tumultuously to her tongue. A shrug, however, of her shapely shoulders, and the response, somewhat stiffly spoken, of—

'I quite share in your surprise, and I dislike the man especially myself. Mr. Mainwaring, however, thinks him both agreeable and well informed, so that here he is, and here he seems likely to remain,' were the only betrayals of the fact that the lady was—in common parlance—'put out.'

A few moments later the pair—guest and hostess — were on their way downstairs, a summons to 'tea' having been brought them by one of the footmen, whose quiet tap at the door was a fortunate interruption to the conversation which had been, pending his advent, carried on between the ladies upstairs.

CHAPTER V.

'O Life! thou art a falling load
Along a rough, a weary road,
To wretches such as I!'

BURNS.

As the 'intelligent reader' has probably already more than begun to surmise, Claudine Montez had not, on that terrible November night when D'Arcy Mainwaring lay prone and unconscious on his tossing bed-place, either committed suicide or been accidentally drowned in the raging waters of Lake Ontario. For those dainty limbs of hers there was reserved a far different fate than that of feeding the giant fishes of the inland sea; and it has now become advisable (seeing that mystification and imbroglio do not, as a rule, add to the legitimate interest of a story), that a light should be thrown on the strange circumstances which led, not only to Claudine's disappearance, but to her rescue from death, and to

a future which was fated in truth to prove a wondrous contrast to any which in her wildest dreams she had imagined could be hers. The accident, which was eventually productive of many important results, was, in point of fact, very simple. When, with a mind thrown off its balance by extremity of terror, the girl, without being moved thereto by any rational purpose, staggered down the ladder which led from the saloon to the lower deck, the rain was pouring down in torrents, and utter darkness was on the face of the earth. Never before had she found herself in those 'lower regions' to which any of the negro population who chanced to be on board the 'boats' were relegated; the deck was wet and slippery, her brain felt dizzy and confused—what wonder was it, therefore, that her feet stumbled, and that the wandering creature (there chancing unfortunately to exist, full in her way, a gaping aperture between the vessels' planks) should have fallen headlong into the 'hold' below? The shock of the fall deprived her of consciousness, and she lay for many an hour on those hard boards, with the sounds of busy life above her head, and an atmosphere that was redolent of anything but Araby's sweet perfumes round her.

The tempest, which throughout the afternoon

and night had raged with a fury that had wrecked almost every vessel which on the great lake had been exposed to its wrath, subsided gradually as the morning broke; and the captain of the steamer, who had by that time fully recovered his equanimity, commenced without delay his preparations for weighing anchor. His frail fine-weather craft had made her last summer voyage; there were damages to be repaired, and a thorough overhauling of the vessel was, without any unnecessary postponement, to be commenced. The captain's eye, as the quick return trip was being made, was 'everywhere,' and it was by those ubiquitous orbs that a fragment of torn black lace which adhered to a splinter of wood on the lower deck was first perceived and then curiously peered into. The sight of this relic of a lady's dress brought immediately not only to *his* mind, but to the memories of all present, the ill-fated wife of the British saloon passenger, who, as was generally supposed, lay dead beneath the waters of the lake; but the effect upon the skipper's imagination of that torn fragment was of greater moment to the girl's interests than would have been a passing sensation of pity, for the idea flashed with lightning-like rapidity through his brain, that the bewildered lady might in the darkness

of the night, and whilst the 'boat' was rolling heavily, have fallen into the 'hold,' the entrance to which had been incautiously left unguarded.

The skipper's first proceeding, after this not irrational idea had occurred to him, was to let fly a perfect volley of oaths and execrations at the 'darned niggurs,' whose duty had been thus shamefully neglected; then he forthwith ordered a search to be made, the result of which was that in a few more minutes the apparently lifeless body of poor Claudine was, by the aid of two stalwart negroes, raised upon the deck.

'Dead as a door-nail!' exclaimed the captain, who, though by no means especially deficient in humanity, had, seeing that he had detected on the ivory brow and almond-shaped finger-nails of the girl the signs of a despised and alien race, hardened his heart against her; but an old negress who happened to be on board, and who had once been employed as nurse in a Baltimore hospital, declared that the ill-fated young creature still lived. But for the perfection of the form which, in strong contrast to her ugliness, rested on the black woman's knee, it is possible that no attempts would have been made on the part of the Yankee captain to ascertain whether or not the girl yet breathed; but, seeing that she was

'beautiful exceedingly,' he caused a mirror to be placed before her lips, and perceiving that the surface thereof was dimmed, he roughly told the 'coloured' woman that she might try her hand on 'the Britisher's fancy gal.'

And it so chanced that the erring one whose loveliness had proved to her so fatal a gift did eventually, although by slow degrees, recover from the effects of a severe concussion of the brain which had followed on her fall. The awakening from that death-like trance was very terrible; and as the whole misery of her situation broke upon her half-bewildered mind, she felt her courage fail her at the prospect which continued life presented to her view. She was alone! The man to whom she had given her whole heart—the man, too, who was the father of her infant boy—had, believing her to be dead, gone, she knew not whither; and her child, her darling—the fair white blossom for which she had garnered up in her warm heart all the love that she could spare from D'Arcy—was torn from her, as she despairingly feared, for ever! From the captain of the steamer she had, on her recovery, learned all that he could tell her concerning the 'stranger' with whom she had been travelling. The Britisher, he said, had been 'kinder put about, and that was a fact,' when

he found that she was missing, and had had the boat searched that night from stem to *starn* afore he would give her up for lost.

'But whar was the use,' he continued, 'of hanging about looking arter a dead gal's ghost? He took the cars, so he did, with the woman and the babby, to Buffalo, and I guess as he's in Eu*rope* by this time, or nigh upon it.'

The forlorn and lonely creature, as she listened to these hope-crushing words, was still lying on the narrow bed in the 'state-room' of the *Ohio*, to which she had been in the first place consigned; but

'Beauty still being mistress of the world,'

even a Yankee captain's prejudice against 'niggur' blood was capable of being subdued by the contemplation of a face so fair as that of Claudine. So, for a while at least, and till she was able, as the skipper said, to look round her, he had given her both food and shelter on board the 'boat,' which during the winter months was exempt from service. But this state of things could not last. Claudine, whose sole worldly property consisted of a watch and chain, together with three valuable rings, the gifts of D'Arcy Mainwaring, could not afford to remain inactive. Through sheer necessity she was, therefore, constrained to

part with those cherished mementoes, seeing that in no other way could she defray the expense of a journey to the South; for it was to her native city that she, with a heart heavy as lead within her breast, resolved to return. It was there, at least, that she had a right to turn for shelter—there, and there only, that she might hope to learn some tidings of her lost protector and of the child whose love, as she now felt, 'lay deepest, dearest of all' within her breast.

The sale of her ornaments realized a sum sufficiently large to enable her not only to present the good-natured Yankee captain with a small token of her lasting gratitude, but to ensure for her, during her voyage down the Mississippi, the (to her) almost necessary luxury of a state-cabin to herself. But for the comparative privacy which this arrangement secured for her, the annoyances and trials which the forlorn young creature endured during the *trajet* (one which lasted nine weary days and nights) would have been even heavier than they were. Utterly out of the question as would have been the suspicion by a 'foreigner' that Claudine Montez was that tabooed thing, an 'Octoroon,' the passengers on board the *Delaware* steamboat recognised almost at a glance the fact; and grievous would have been the consequences to her had she, in ignor-

ance that so it was, made her appearance at the public meals. At that time—namely, shortly before the war between the North and South broke out—public opinion in the Free States ran, if possible, still higher than it had ever before done against the coloured population and their *owners;* but, even if this had not been so, neither the extraordinary beauty of Claudine, nor her refinement of manner and high-bred air, would have availed to save her from insult and unveiled contumely. In the seclusion of her own cabin she therefore, during the whole of the weary voyage, abided. The stewardess, a 'coloured' woman, brought her the food which she had little appetite to eat; indeed, but for the sustaining hope of one day seeing again the child to which she had given birth, the unhappy girl, who had never been taught either her duty to God, her neighbour, or herself, would have been sorely tempted to put an end to a life which, oppressed as she was with grief and care, seemed to her

'A burden more than she could bear.'

Amongst those from whose presence Claudine the most carefully hid herself were those amongst the male passengers who, seeing in the unprotected 'yellow gal' (as amongst themselves they

called this fairest of Nature's works) an easy prey, absolutely persecuted her with the insulting proposals which she was powerless to resent. Those who have travelled on American river-steamers do not need to be told that each 'state-room' has two doors—the one opening into the 'saloon,' and the opposite one to the uncovered deck. By means of the latter the lady passengers are enabled to obtain, should they be so inclined, both air and exercise, and this without being necessarily exposed to the observation of their fellow-voyagers. Of this privilege Claudine was, however, owing to the untiring watchfulness of more than one of her tormentors, deprived. Not an inch width of her outer door could be left open, and not a step could she take in the purer air outside, but an attempt would be made to widen the aperture, or the arm of a swaggering New York *swell* would be insolently held out for her acceptance.

Ah, how bitterly did she, in moments such as these, lament the hard fate which had separated her from D'Arcy! The respectful tenderness of his manner—the manner of a well-born English gentleman towards the woman who had lost *caste* by giving herself soul and body to him—was never more appreciated by her than when it was contrasted with the odious familiarity and

almost *brutal* love-making of the Broadway *jeunesse dorée.* Would she ever see again, she often asked herself, the man who had wooed her with such passionate words, but who, in the delirium of fever, had muttered sentences which she, humbled and in terror, had interpreted to herself as meaning that he was weary of the bonds which linked her to him? With him, she doubted not, was the child over whose birth she had rejoiced with as 'prime a mother's bliss' as ever wedded wife had felt or known,

> 'When to her eager lips was brought
> Her infant's thrilling kiss.'

No sense of shame, in that neither in church nor in a registry office had she and D'Arcy Mainwaring plighted their vows, had marred the rapture which, at the birth of her baby boy, thrilled to her heart's core; nor did she now, though the bluffs of Natchez were in sight, and the moment must soon arrive when the 'old familiar faces'—the faces of her parents and her friends—must meet her sight, shrink with any sense of humiliation from the coming ordeal. She had but followed on the steps of those who had gone before her. The accepted fate of a 'coloured' girl was that of being a white man's *leman,* and her 'misfortune' would, in the eyes

of *her* world (and who amongst us has not a 'world' to whose opinions we either meekly bow, or are, at any rate, in some sort, interested in and affected by?) simply consist of the fact that, owing to 'circumstances over which she had no control,' Claudine Montez reaped no present advantage from her 'venture.' Her 'freedom' had, at no inconsiderable cost, been purchased by Mr. Mainwaring, who, as he gave, without any attempt at bargaining, the sum demanded, felt, as was only natural, contempt and disgust the most unbounded towards the degraded old Don, who, in this shameless, bare-faced fashion, made merchandise of his child. In the Old World, sale and barter of a similar description are conducted with decency, and, to a certain extent, 'under the rose'; but this gold-grasping slave-owner was totally incapable of either attempting to conceal, or of blushing at the ignominy of his position. His daughter was his property, and that property he had a right to profit by.

Claudine, it is needless to say, derived no pecuniary benefit from a transaction which had indeed been, by D'Arcy's wish, effected without her knowledge. Love, pure and passionate as ever burned in woman's breast, had alone been the cause of an act which, for the unhappy

girl, had ended so disastrously; and when she at last became convinced by her lover's silence (for she had caused many a despairing advertisement to be inserted in the newspapers) that he no longer cared for her, she might in saddest truth, and from a heart brimful of memory's joys and sorrows, have echoed the Scotch girl's lament:

> 'Ah, had I wist, before I kiss'd
> That love had been so ill to win,
> I'd lock'd my heart in a case of gold,
> And pinn'd it with a silver pin.'

CHAPTER VI.

'Odours of orange-flowers and spice
Reached them from time to time
Like airs that breathe from Paradise
Upon a world of crime.'

LONGFELLOW.

AFTER awhile, the idea of finding again the child which she had lost became so fixed in Claudine's brain, as well-nigh to take the place of every other thought and memory. In so far as her limited means and scant experience enabled her to do so, she had taken active measures to discover, if possible, the whereabouts of Mr. Mainwaring and her son. The few persons at New Orleans who remembered the young Englishman and his friends were closely questioned regarding any chance words which the travellers might, concerning their *home* addresses, have let fall. Not a few also of the leading English papers but were, from time to time, the mediums, in their

columns, of appeals which, had they been seen and understood by the man to whom they were addressed, would certainly not have remained unresponded to. But it so chanced (and some of the reasons why this should have been are not unknown to the reader) that D'Arcy Mainwaring remained to the day of his death ignorant of the fact that Claudine Montez still lived. All things considered, indeed, I think that the discovery by him of the truth would have been a circumstance very far from desirable. Moreover, had the poor Octoroon been informed that another woman possessed — she being his lawful wife — the strongest of all claims on the man whom she (Claudine) had so fondly loved, methinks that even the recovery of her lost child would scarcely have availed to comfort her; but she was spared that pang, and when, after the speedy passing by of months and even years of waiting, she was at length enabled to satisfy the craving of her heart, and commence in person, and in the Old World, the search for her darling, she had yet to learn, not only that the lover of her girlhood had married, but that the wife who had replaced her in his affections had made him the father of another son, and was in every respect well suited to promote his happiness.

The events which at last enabled Claudine to

visit Europe, and there pursue her search, came about after this wise. After the breaking out of the war between the North and the South, New Orleans grew to be, for all classes of its inhabitants, greatly altered as a place of residence. Visitors in plenty from Europe were attracted, either by curiosity or by some worthier motive, to a city, the fame of which, both for its hospitalities, the recklessness of its pleasure-seeking inhabitants, and the beauty of its women, had long since been spread abroad amongst the nations of the earth. At the time of which I write, nearly seven years had elapsed since Claudine Montez's supposed death, and she was now—at the age of twenty-three—in the full zenith of her glorious beauty. Numerous, as well as persevering, were the proposals made to a girl whose reputation for a loveliness far above that of most of her compeers had reached the ears, and fired the imagination, of many an adventurous son of Adam. Rich foreigners had laid their splendid offerings at her feet, and more than one Southern gentleman, whose wealth had not *only* consisted in plantations, which, without slave labour, would not yield their increase, had offered to share his riches with a woman who was—with one important exception—fitted in every respect to grace a far higher position than

any in which the most ardent amongst her admirers had proposed to place her.

At that time, in New Orleans, the events of the mighty war which was desolating the great Republic were (even to those who were not engaged in it, and who did not happen to possess near and dear ones whose lives were imperilled by strife) the one absorbing topic of interest. Owing in a great measure to that cause, but also somewhat to the fact that to lookers-on, at least, the 'game' seemed to be nearly played out, and the emancipation of the despised race almost a *fait accompli*, the social position of some, at least, amongst those same looked-down-on 'darkies' was slightly improved. The ears of strangers visiting the city were far less frequently than had formerly been the case outraged by the unchivalrous boastings of 'freeborn Americans,' in that the laws of their 'great country' were so framed as to deliver the loveliest women in the land, 'tied and bound,' into the white man's power; for the time was surely near at hand

> 'When all men would be free,
> And musical as silver bells
> Their falling chains would be.'

When the war was drawing to a close, and when Federals and Confederates were alike

satiated with carnage, and sick at heart by reason of the kindred blood which had flowed like water on the battle-fields of their country, a certain wealthy foreign nobleman, yclept Prince Wolkersdorf—and, by-the-way, his rank was as real as his income was incontestable—took it into a head, which many believed to be not over-well furnished with brains, to visit the 'seat of war.' The age of this well-endowed individual might have been a year or two over forty, and his features would not, though irregular, have been wholly destitute of attractiveness, if that pleasant thing—a genial smile—had ever lighted up their gloom. The Prince did indeed look what he was, namely, a most unhappy man. Not many months had elapsed since his young wife—beautiful and beloved—had died in giving birth to a child, whose little life endured 'but as the twinkling of an eye,' and now, urged thereto by the advice of sympathizing friends, the half-broken-hearted husband, grown weary of the slowness with which time, the healer of such wounds as his, did his accustomed work, suddenly resolved to try what effect entire change of country and of scene, together with—possibly—some experience of personal danger, might produce upon a heart so bruised and crushed as his. 'Man delighted him not,' and, according to his

own fixed belief, the power of woman to charm and pleasure him was gone for ever! He had ceased, in fact—at least, such was his own description of the melancholy state to which grief had reduced him—even to perceive that the daughters of Eve were fair!

It is early spring, and two men, one of whom is a handsome young fellow, whose cheek is smooth almost as a girl's, whilst the other, bronzed and bearded, looks—as indeed he is—fully twenty years the youngster's senior, are riding slowly along one of the sandy roads, shaded for the most part by ilex trees, which are to be found in the neighbourhood of the city. The younger man, whose name is Rudolf von Steinfeldt, is a relation of, and secretary to, the Prince, his companion; he is, moreover, a favourite—and that chiefly by reason of his joyous, cheery nature—of that heart-stricken and disconsolate nobleman. The quality, however, which more than any other has caused Prince Wolkersdorf to cling to the society of his young cousin, is the power of *sympathizing*, combined with a more than average aptitude at falling in love, which are the salient points of the lad's character. His talk is now of the tender passion, and he—the Prince—is listening to him willingly, for the theme is one which always awakes an echo in the bereaved

man's breast. It is not so very long ago since he was young himself—young even as is this handsome Rudolf now, and with a capacity as keen as his to see an angel in every lovely form that met his eye. The fleeting nature of his young friend's 'fancies' did not avail to chill the kindly feeling with which the more experienced traveller along those flower-strewn paths listened to the lover's thrilling chapters of the 'old old story.' Well did the hapless widower, fondly believing that his own heart was buried in his Wilhelmina's grave, recognise the sweeping truth that

> 'Sweet words showering from a rosy lip,
> And smiles, and sighs, and tears, and kisses warm,'

have had, since the world began, the power to make even sages play the parts of 'very men;' and so—for had not he, too, been fickle in his day—a blithesome rover, in fact, from flower to flower—he gave ear, in a lenient spirit, to Rudolf's sentimental rhapsodies.

'I wish you could see her, mon Prince!' the Count—for he *is* a Count—is saying. 'She is the most glorious creature! Tall and blue-eyed, with a complexion unlike anything I ever saw before——'

'My dear boy,' puts in the Prince mildly, 'it seems to me that you have already discovered

the same peculiarity in other women whom you have thought you loved.'

'Ah! but this one is different. It is the *blond mat*, as the French call it, of the Creole, with an under colouring of carnation, which surges up when she is pleased or agitated to the pure oval of her exquisite cheeks, and makes one dizzy with gazing on her wondrous loveliness.'

He speaks with the fervour of an impassioned boy, and the Prince, remembering his own youth, responds, from the height of his own superior wisdom, with kindly and considerate words.

'And the name of this perfect creature?' he asks. 'Is she of good blood and breeding? Some of the old Creole families in Louisiana can give, I believe, a good account of their origin.'

The secretary pauses a moment ere he replies, and then says impetuously:

'Her name is Claudine Montez, her father is a Spaniard and a slave-owner, and her mother is a Quadroon. She belongs, you see, mon Prince, to that cruelly persecuted race of beings who, be their worth or beauty ever so transcendant, can never hope—in America at least—to rise in the social scale. No form of marriage which a coloured woman may with a 'white' man have

gone through, can, as you know, make their union legal. The laws of free America forbid the banns!'

'An anomaly, doubtless,' rejoined the Prince, who, as he threw away the end of his cigar, added drily, 'but one which may nevertheless sometimes have its uses. For instance, you, in your present mood, my dear Rudolf, are capable of making any sacrifice for this, the last woman of the many who have bewitched you with their beauty whom you ought to marry.'

'Granted,' was the reply, spoken this time without either hesitation or delay. 'If to marry Claudine Montez be a sacrifice, I should esteem myself only too highly blest by being permitted to offer the oblation to one so gifted and so peerless as the girl of whom I speak.'

'And your family—your widowed mother? What would the Countess von Steinfeldt think of such a marriage for her only son? With sixteen quarterings of nobility, methinks, dear boy, that you might do better for yourself than mate with an Octoroon, beautiful as a houri though the girl may be.'

Of the two equestrians who were thus engaged in a conversation which was to them one of absorbing interest, only one was aware of the fact that they had approached very near to the spot

where, embowered by trees, and covered with rampantly-growing climbing plants, the wooden house wherein lived Claudine Montez reared its unconspicuous head.

Nothing, after her return home, had been farther from the girl's purpose than the leading by her of a life of seclusion from the 'world.' To attain what was now the chief aim and object of her existence—the possession by her of wealth, power, and good repute—was, she told herself, absolutely necessary. Only by her marriage with a rich and influential member of society could she—at least, such was her fixed belief—hope for success in her undertaking. Access to the 'world' to which D'Arcy Mainwaring belonged would alone afford her opportunities for inquiry into the mystery which her soul had so long thirsted to penetrate. She knew herself to be beautiful, and to the wondrous charms with which Nature had endowed her she trusted for the attainment of her ends. Already, as we have seen, a young 'foreigner of distinction' had become so bewitched by her manifold attractions that he was prepared to commit, for her sake, any act of madness. He had been introduced to Don Diego by an old acquaintance of that elderly ruffian's, the said acquaintance being a clever adventurer—an English 'free lance'—who with

a hired yacht, a prize-winner of renown, had contrived to 'run the blockade,' and had thereby realized not a few thousand dollars. After that introduction, the visits of the Count to the cottage in the wood had been of no rare occurrence.

The Spaniard, ever on the watch to make merchandise of his child, was careful not to let the occasion slip. He had heard—as who in the city had not?—of the arrival of Prince Wolkersdorf and his suite, and the opportunity thus afforded him of again advantageously disposing of his daughter appeared, to his brutalized and avaricious mind, a highly favourable one. The young Count was precisely at the age when men reckon every moment of time lost that is not occupied either by a sweetheart in person, or by the image of some adored one whose memory is still a thing beatified and all-sufficing. When he first became acquainted with lovely Claudine Montez, the niche in his heart, where some fair goddess was wont to be enshrined, happened to be empty, and the work of filling the vacant space with the fair Octoroon was speedily effected. A few, very few, meetings beneath the perfume-emitting orange-trees — some softly-whispered words amongst the gorgeous blossoms, over and around which humming-birds, in dazzling

plumage and in countless numbers, glanced and flitted—had stirred the fire within; and later still, when the glittering stars shone bright above—bright as only in Southern skies they *can* shine—there had been—for

> 'Qui ne sait que la nuit a des puissances telles
> Que les femmes y sont, comme les fleurs, plus belles,
> Et que tout vent du soir qui les peut effleurer
> Leur enlève un parfum plus doux à respirer?'—

more than one moment of sweet love-madness, and more than one lingering hand-pressure when the handsome, high-born lad whispered, at parting, his tender *au revoir* to the Octoroon. This had been all, and yet passages such as these, trivial as they may appear to have been, were sufficient (for the one who did not love knew how to feign, and *intended that such a result should follow* on their interviews) not only to make wild work in the breast and brain of Rudolf de Steinfeldt, but to awaken in the mind of Prince Wolkersdorf a keen anxiety regarding the mental condition of his young and impulsive companion. To a certain extent he felt himself to be, during their Transatlantic trip, responsible for the well-being of this only son of an almost idolizing mother, and, understanding well the moral weakness of the boy's character, he arrived without delay at the determination to judge for himself,

not only of the degree of temptation offered, but of the amount of infatuation to be feared. This resolve he at once imparted to Rudolf.

'You must make me acquainted,' he said, 'with this *belle des belles*. You see,' he added, with the grave smile and quiet irony of a man sure of his own strength and the lasting power of loving memory, 'that I am willing to run personal risk on your account, for I too may have my *côté faible*.'

No sooner had the words left his lips, than a sudden turn in the road brought full in view the picturesque dwelling in which still abided 'Madam Anastasy Joyce,' a lady whose form, since we first made her acquaintance, had considerably increased in circumference. Under the foliage-adorned shelter of the wide verandah, with many a glossy leaf and fragrant blossom making a framework to the lovely picture, stood Claudine, white-robed and graceful as a Muse. Count Rudolf, with suddenly extended hand, grasped his companion's arm. There was no need of words; with one accord they urged their horses into a gentle trot, and as they drew rein at the open door, the girl who by D'Arcy Mainwaring had been loved and lost stepped down to meet them.

CHAPTER VII.

'The devil fisheth best for souls of men
When his hook's baited with a lovely limb.'
ALEXANDER SMITH.

'I NEVER could have believed, mon Prince, that after opening out all my heart to you, you would have become my rival with Claudine. I know well that, compared to yours, my chances of success were less than nothing; but I might, but for you, have *tried* to win her. I might——'

But here the poor young fellow, whose voice had been rendered tremulous by reason of the unshed tears of which he felt so keenly, miserably ashamed, broke down altogether; and burying his face in his hands, sobbed with an *abandon* which more befitted a woman or a child than the full-grown man he was.

Prince Wolkersdorf, than whom a kinder-hearted being did not exist, was distressed beyond measure at this unexpected outburst of

emotion. His affection for Rudolf was that of a father to a son, and to see the boy suffer (albeit that suffering was a remedial measure) was a source of pain to him. Moreover, the charge of rivalry which had been brought against himself, was one which he could not, with entire truth, repudiate. He had acted for the best. Convinced that a marriage, such as Rudolf had contemplated, would be fatal to his interests, he had, at the risk of becoming himself enamoured of a woman whose fascinations few men would have been able to resist, thrown himself into 'the imminent deadly breach,' and had thus commenced a conflict against Fate and woman's wiles in which he was little likely to come forth the victor.

The two men are in their joint sitting-room at the St. Charles' Hotel. They have dined at the *table d'hôte*, a long, and to both, on this occasion, a tedious banquet, for the mind of neither is free from anxious, if not agitating, thought, and many a well-cooked dish—from the gombo soup which is a *specialité* in Southern America, to the delicious ices which invariably form a part of a New Orleans hotel *menu*—was sent away untasted.

The thoughts of both were with Claudine. The Prince, surprised and also not a little

humiliated by the discovery that he has not altogether buried his affections in his Wilhelmina's grave, has come to the conclusion that even a wiser head than his own might have been turned by the exquisite beauty of the Octoroon; and Rudolf, distracted by the pangs of jealousy, was occupied by the self-tormenting task of passing in mental review the several proofs, and alas! they were but too many, of the miserable truth that Claudine, his adored and peerless one, had ceased to set any value either on his visits or his attentions. The contrast between the past and present—between the hours when she had watched and waited for his coming, and those during which he longed in vain for some small token of her liking, was too terrible! And—a circumstance which added terribly to his weight of woe—the change had come with the suddenness of an earthquake shock! There had been literally no preparation for the blow which had so cruelly overwhelmed him. From the hour when Prince Wolkersdorf first saw him in company with Claudine, the change commenced, and had literally struck him dumb with astonishment and dismay. Her manner, as was her custom, had been sweet and gracious; but when he called to mind the widely different impressions which he from time to time (and

that neither boastfully nor untruthfully) had given to the Prince of his relations with the ladye of his love, it half maddened him to think that *now* his relative and mentor would never learn the truth concerning the foundations of his sometime hopes.

To speak—as matters now stood—of the *facts* from which his inferences as regarded Claudine's former liking were drawn, was an idea which never—inasmuch as he was a gentleman, and the soul of honour—occurred to him. The trial was, however, to him a bitter one. The twin curses of his twenty years, namely, sensitiveness and vanity, were warring in his breast, and he suffered almost more from the conviction that Prince Wolkersdorf would for ever remain in ignorance of the encouragement which he had received, than from his almost conviction that the higher rank and larger rent-roll of his friend had caused the fickleness which cut him (Rudolf) to the soul.

The sight of his young secretary's emotion caused, as I have said, much pain to the Prince. 'Conscience,' as has been truly said, 'makes cowards of us all;' and, to a certain extent, the conscience of the older man was not clear. He had ventured near the fire and had been scorched. It is true that he had so ventured for the attain-

ment of an end which was laudable in itself. True also was it that *he* had seen no signs on Claudine's part of any feeling warmer than friendship for Rudolf. But although such was in fact the case, he could not entirely divest himself of a sense of wrong-doing towards the lad, and it was this 'sense' which caused him to deal very tenderly with the grief that 'would have way.'

'My dear boy,' he said, laying his hand kindly on the young man's *shaking* shoulder. 'If I could have foretold this—or even half of this—I would never, believe me, have—have run the risk of giving you pain. I believed in your liking for this girl—nay, cheer up, boy, and bear your sorrow like a man—but I believed that *this* was nothing stronger or more serious than have been the many ephemeral fancies which you have for the time imagined to be eternal, and when — when I saw how dangerous was Claudine's beauty, I felt alarmed for you—for your mother——'

'And not for yourself, mon Prince!' cried Rudolf, starting from his seat, and with dilated eyes, and dishevelled hair, standing before his rival. 'You did not foresee, of course, that you, too, are not invulnerable—that you, tco, have eyes to see and a heart to feel. God in heaven!

When I told you of my love—when I thought to awaken your sympathy with my hopes, did I dream of such an act of——'

The black word which had trembled on the lad's agitated lips was *treachery*, and had it escaped those portals, not all the excuses which the Prince in the kindliness of his nature would have been willing to make for Rudolf could have prevented a rupture between the friends. Happily, however, the sorely-afflicted lover is not so utterly distraught as to be unable, even at the last moment, to 'moderate the rancour of his tongue.' For a moment he pauses, and his companion, whose extreme gravity and composure are in striking contrast with the young man's only too evident anger and excitement, takes advantage of the opportunity to say—not harshly, but, nevertheless, in the tone of one accustomed to being obeyed:

'This is a subject, Rudolf, which, between you and me, scarcely bears discussion. You are agitated and unhappy, a state of mind in which you might be led to utter words which the next minute you would wish unsaid. For your sake and mine, my boy, let me earnestly beg of you to avoid the chances of a quarrel.'

The words, as well as the manner of their utterance, startle Rudolf as might have done a

pistol-shot. It is the first time that his chief had manifested in his demeanour towards him the determination to be obeyed, and the lad, although no coward, is quelled at once. The possibility of what the Prince had, in his calm displeasure, spoken of as a 'quarrel,' is too awful a contingency to be even for a moment contemplated; and so, after murmuring a few words of regret and apology, the aggrieved but already repentant secretary leaves, with hasty footsteps the presence of the man who is, as he—Rudolf—has only too good reason to fear, a successful competitor for the favour of Claudine.

Left thus to his own companionship and to a *tête-à-tête* as it were with a conscience which, seeing that he is a just man by nature, has never become seared or hardened, Prince Wolkersdorf is anything but a happy man. He had spoken the simple truth when he had declared to Rudolf that no treacherous intent had led him to seek the dangerous society of the Octoroon. He might also with truth have added (but then he, also, was far too true a gentleman to boast of even a coquette's encouragement), that the fair object of his young friend's affections had, from the first, allowed him to perceive that her new admirer might, an it pleased him to make the effort, obtain her for his own. He was far from

being a vain man, and was quite willing to admit to himself that to his superior rank and riches he owes the radiant smiles and shy, half-passionate glances which—for flesh is weak, and he has not outlived the power of loving—have more than once set his pulses throbbing and his heart beating wildly when he is in the presence of Claudine. He can, he tells himself, if he so chooses, make his own this glorious creature, whose loveliness has begun, like the fumes of old wine, to steal into his brain. She has, however, learned a 'world of wisdom' since she first flung herself upon D'Arcy Mainwaring's breast and whispered in his enraptured ear that she adored him. More chary is she now of the smiles and honeyed words which in the monotonous *après* of a dual life are so soon amongst the things forgotten. She knows their value now. They are her stock in trade—jewels wherewith she hopes to buy the mighty thing she craves for, and so, for she had gauged the man's character and temperament at a glance, she plays upon the Prince's passions at her will, and holding the *dragée haut*, waits with assured confidence the result.

And he? Well, it is to him soon no secret that only in *one* way can the woman, from whose bewitching spells he finds himself powerless to escape, become his own. Descendant of a slave

although she is, Claudine, whose style of beauty is of the superb and regal order, bears herself, even when

> 'The tell-tale blood rushed into his face
> And stabbed the love secreted in his heart,'

after a fashion which held in check the wild words which were surging to his lips. He *could* not ask a girl so pure and proud to be his mistress! For he believes her (men are not suspicious when they madly love, and it had come to *that* with Wolkersdorf) to be free from stain as is the lily on its stem; and being pure, to assail her ears with the unhallowed offers of tempestuous passion is a crime which the chivalrous Prince finds it impossible to commit. He had heard—as who has not?—that the coloured offspring of the white men's lust for beauty are, as surely as the sparks fly upwards, destined to a life of shame; and had he some half-dozen years previously visited the pleasant, wicked city in which so many deeds that could not meet the light were daily, nightly done, he might have heard the news—casually spoken, for such things were too common to be events of note at New Or*leens*—that the handsomest slave-girl in all the State had been bought and carried away by an English stranger. But years have sped by

since those days—seven stirring years!—and life is short, and events succeed one another, even in peace-time, quickly in the Crescent City. The girl of fifteen is now the woman of twenty-three, and all that at the present time is known or spoken of Claudine Montez is that in works of charity—in tending the wounded, and speaking words of comfort to the sick and sorrowing—there is not in all the city a woman who is the freed slave's equal. For she is not, in truth, altogether bad, this woman who in all her life has had so little encouragement to be good. Although it had been her purpose to wrest an offer of marriage from Rudolf, it would have been, as truly she felt, a cruel deed to bind one so young and inexperienced as he in life-long fetters to a woman on whose past there was a stain—a woman, besides, who loved him not.

'Poor boy!' she had said to herself when he, with a happy smile (a smile which her sweet wiles had brought there) upon his beardless lip, had left her alone beneath the orange-boughs, 'he is deserving of a better fate. An only son—a mother's darling! And *I* to work his ruin!' And then, with eyes fixed dreamily upon the countless glowworms which glittered on the ground about her, Claudine sighs wearily as she thinks of the child that she has lost.

It had given her a pang to mortify and disappoint the frank-hearted lad whose truant fancy had been so quickly caught; but she felt no fear of any lasting consequences, any evil results for him, following on her fickleness. He had not offered her his hand; there had been between them none of the reality of love; and now, as she repeated to herself, there had come to her *one* to whom injury could not accrue through marrying her. The Prince was of mature age, and if *he* did not object to mingling with the *bleu azur* of his blood the mongrel fluid which filled *her* veins, there were none of his family who could reproach him for the deed. And he should never—so to her own heart she swore—repent him of the sacrifice. To him she would ever be a true and loving wife; whilst he—well, he would aid her with all the power of his wealth and influence to find her child—her little D'Arcy, for by that name had the boy been christened. But in order to obtain that aid she must—and the ordeal would be indeed a trying one—reveal to the Prince the fact of that lost child's existence! She must tell the story of her shame to the man who, after hearing it, might find his love to 'shrivel away like a potsherd;' and should this be so, what would become of her cherished hope that through his instrumentality she might

in the Old World be enabled to in person prosecute her search? Long and seriously did she ponder on the difficulties which beset her path, and at last she resolved—for she had fathomed both the weakness and the strength of the man with whom she had to do—to continue her work of subjugation till such time as Love would be in truth 'lord of all' in the breast of her admirer. Then, and not till then, must her tale be told—be told whilst yet he worshipped with a lover's ardent passion, and before the calmer affection of a husband should have replaced the fiery madness that had made of him a woman's slave.

CHAPTER VIII.

'Love is not to be reason'd down, or lost
In high ambition, or a thirst of greatness.'
ADDISON.

YEARS have passed since the eventful day when Claudine, with the tact and quick-sightedness with which Nature, in part compensation possibly for their weakness, has endowed the frailer sex, revealed to Prince Wolkersdorf the earlier chapters of her eventful history. The subtle poison which she had been instilling into his veins had by that time done its work. The woman's beauty had made his manhood weak enough for any act of folly. Life, with all its varied interests—its duties and its attractions—seemed now to him to be, without Claudine, a valueless and useless thing. The memory of his high-born princess had faded into the cloudy pallor of a dream, and that grandly-formed, languid-eyed Octoroon (in this infatuated man's

opinion), the only 'perfect woman, nobly planned,' on whom his eyes had ever rested, had, to his great joy, promised—not unconditionally, she was too wise for *that*—to be his wife.

'My angel—my adored one! *Mein holdes schönes mädchen!*' he, holding her slim white hands in his, had whispered in passionate accents to the ear that lay—for her head was pillowed on his breast—so near his wildly-beating heart. But ere the last words had fairly left his lips, she (for the German language had been taught her in the Paris Convent, and she had wisely not allowed the knowledge there acquired to escape her utterly) drew one shapely hand from his imprisoning grasp, and laid it lightly on his bearded mouth.

'No, no, mon Prince!' she, in the soft whisper which is peculiar to her race, and with a tremor in her voice which added to its wondrous charm, said slowly. 'Such words from you to me are unbefitting — undeserved; for —— ah! well I know'—burying her fair head still deeper from his sight—'that when you have heard that which I have to tell, my short-lived days of happiness may be over, and that I shall perhaps be doomed to see your face no more.'

She has chosen the hour of her confession well. In the wide veranda of the wooden

house of which, at the moment, she and her lover are the only occupants, two luxurious rocking-chairs have been placed in close proximity. Now, for the purposes of love-making, the description of chair which, especially in Southern America, is considered so indispensable an article of furniture, is, for various and self-evident reasons, unfitted, and it was for this reason that Claudine, when her exordium was concluded, slid gracefully from her oscillating seat, and, crouching in a humble but touchingly attractive attitude upon the Indian matting which covered the boarded floor, leant her head against her high-born lover's knee, and in broken accents told her tale.

He heard her in silence, for the shock which her opening words had given him was very great. He had in truth believed her to be a 'maiden fair, pure as the unsunned snow,' and now he had learnt—ah heavens! how great had been the fall, and how overwhelming the contrast!—that, not only had she loved and given herself to another, but that that other was still—in all probability—in the land of the living, and might at any moment (and as the frightful possibility flashed through his brain, the Prince clenched his strong fists furiously) cross the path of the woman whom he had betrayed. It was his eagerness to end, in this matter, the

suspense which tortured him, that restored to the agitated man the power of speech.

'Did you love him? Is he alive?' he with peremptory abruptness said, and then, not waiting for a reply he added, 'The scoundrel! A child of fifteen! And he bought you of your father, you say——'

'Yes; such things were not uncommon in this land of boasted freedom. You may not perhaps have read,' she continued in the soft, plaintive accents which were, when the theme was one which pleased him, like music spoken to the ear of her listener, 'what the great and good American poet has written about the slave girl's barter? They are very beautiful lines,' she adds, as her white hands rest clasped upon his knee, and she looks up with her glorious Southern eyes into his working face, 'and perhaps they will make you pity me.'

Amongst Claudine's accomplishments was that of being an admirable reciter, and more than once had she both delighted and surprised Prince Wolkersdorf by the depth of feeling and the artistic power with which she had repeated from memory passages of poetry which happened to have caught her fancy. Like the majority of his countrymen, the Prince was an excellent linguist, and English was almost as familiar

to him as was his mother-tongue. Whether or not, however, he would have answered Claudine's question in the affirmative, she did not wait to learn. Catching eagerly at the opportunity of evading, with the license accorded to beauty, her lover's opening question, and hoping also to hold him so entirely under the magic spell of her attractions that he would, for the time being at least, cease to dwell with inconvenient pertinacity on his last query, she, in a voice silvery as the ripple of a mountain rill, repeated two stanzas of Longfellow's touching ballad:

> 'His heart within him was at strife,
> With such accursed gains,
> For he knew whose passions gave her life,
> Whose blood ran in her veins.
>
> 'But the voice of nature was too weak;
> He took the glittering gold;
> Then pale as death grew the maiden's cheek,
> Her hands as icy cold.'

'Ah me!' she sighed. 'I fear my father's strife with greed was not a long one! And whilst his daughter, a child almost in years, was playing with her hoop and *bilboquet* beneath the orange-trees, how could she, a human being like himself, but alas! a most ill-fated girl, have

guessed that she was being sold—God help her! —to a stranger?'

It was a pretty and a touching picture, and in drawing it she attained her end, the Prince being thus ingeniously given to understand that the sale of which she spoke was the first instead of the last page in that eventful chapter of her life's history. Immense was the relief which this conviction gave him. He could now once more indulge in the delicious belief that *he* was the first, nay, the only man, who had been loved by his exquisite, his imperial Claudine, and in the joy of his recovered faith, he swore to her that she was dearer to him than ever, and that the child for whose loss she mourned should, if he were restored to her arms, be precious to him as though the little one were his own flesh and blood.

The marriage of Prince Wolkersdorf to Mademoiselle Claudine Montez, which took place in Paris two months after the conversation I have just recorded, did not become known to Count Rudolf till after his chief had been for some weeks the husband of his own quondam idol. The friendship which had so long existed between the widowed Countess and the Prince enabled the latter to arrange, without exciting the young

man's suspicions, a two months' absence for his secretary. His mother's health was delicate, and it was her wish that her son should make rather a lengthened stay with her in the old Schloss; and this being so, Rudolf was spared for awhile the knowledge of this consummation of his relation's courtship. Happily, by the time that the intelligence did reach his ears, the charms of a certain blue-eyed Fraulein, with hair the colour of a sheaf of corn and a complexion like a sun-kissed peach, had more than half banished the image of Claudine Montez from his breast.

Weeks and months sped by, and the Princess Wolkersdorf found herself—a circumstance not altogether unknown in the annals of married pairs—less madly worshipped as a wife than she had been as a *fiancée*. A kind and trusting, and withal a truly faithful husband, the Prince was nevertheless a too essentially manly character for any woman to retain, by the mere power of her physical charms, lasting dominion over him; gradually, therefore, and in the normal order of things, that of his fair young Princess waned, and together with that waning there grew up within his breast a strong and marked distaste to all that could, or did, remind him of that portion of his Claudine's past with which *he* had had nought to do. Hateful beyond measure,

now that passion's short-lived reign was over, appeared to him the task of searching for the living proof of his sweet wife's 'misfortune.' Her 'misfortune!' It was thus he spoke of that sad epoch of her life which it sickened his very soul to think of. For he never blamed her! He was too just and chivalrous to make her answerable for the guilt of others, and if there were moments, silent and self-disapproving ones, when he wondered at himself in that he had taken to his heart and home a woman who, as he well knew, was not the '*holdes Mädchen*' which *his* wife and princess should have been, he kept the keen remorse he felt a secret not only from the world, but, for he was loyal to the core, from the quick-witted quondam slave-girl whom he had lifted to his own estate.

And she—how did this woman—this pale, lovely mother, who for long years had thirsted 'even as the hart desireth the water-brooks,' for the sight of her child, how (when the months and even years sped by, and she realized the truth that her husband had no *wish* to find the boy), did she, the impassioned daughter of the tropics, bear her fate? To this I answer, 'Well, and patiently;' for, all unlike Evangeline, who, when hope for her was ended, could find peace,

this woman, as despondence took the place of eager trust, had to silently endure

'All the aching of heart, the restless, unsatisfied longing,
All the dull, deep pain, and constant anguish of patience.'

And yet she made no moan. Habit—that spurious second nature—had so inoculated her being with a sense of the white man's almost awe-inspiring superiority to his darker brethren, and she had become, since her marriage, so painfully conscious of her own false position as a lady of high degree, that a blind and unreasoning submission to her lord's will and pleasure had become as much a thing of course to her as ever did prompt obedience to the plantation 'hand,' when the crack of the overseer's whip sounded in his ears.

But humbled though in her sorely disappointed heart she felt, there was nothing in the outward demeanour of the everywhere-admired Princess Wolkersdorf that betrayed the rankling of the wound within. The *port de reine*—the walk—so firm, yet so elastic, which is the peculiar and especial gift of the women of old Spain—was hers, and who of the many that gazed with admiration at the small, perfectly-shaped head—so richly covered with its profusion of brown silken tresses, and rising right royally above a bust and shoulders which might, could he have

done full justice to their exquisite grace, have made the fortune of a sculptor—would have imagined that in the veins of that thorough-bred seeming, and graciously smiling lady, there ran the blood of a negro slave!

The birth of a baby daughter did much towards reconciling Claudine to the lot which to lookers-on appeared so enviable, and thankful was she when she obtained the permission of the Prince to call his little Princess by the softly sounding name of Dacia.

'I once read a sweet romance, dear Karl,' she said to him, 'of which a pretty child called Dacia was the heroine; and when I am strong again,' added the young mother, over whose couch the Prince, rejoicing in her safety, and thinking that he had never yet seen daughter of Eve so fair, was leaning, 'I will tell you the story of the girl whose name we borrow for our child.'

Claudine grew strong again, but the tale remained untold, nor did the kindly Prince ever surmise the truth that the name borne by his little daughter was coined by her mother for the reason that it in some degree resembled that of her first love. Prince Wolkersdorf had either forgotten, or had never known, the baptismal appellation of the man of whose existence—whether

past or present—he could never endure to think; and thence it followed that the child which from its birth became its father's idol, was made a Christian of after a fashion, and by the aid of a *ruse*, of which he, good man, would have very greatly disapproved.

CHAPTER IX.

> 'Learn this of me, where'er thy lot doth fall,
> Short lot, or not, to be content with all.'
>
> HERRICK.

'I REALLY think we must get rid of that horrible clock, and those nasty French china ornaments. They are so dreadfully lodging-housy, that I don't see how we can—as the room looks now—say "at home" to anybody.'

The scene to which I now introduce my readers is a 'ready-furnished' house of good repute—a lodging-house, in point of fact, to which 'carriage people' occasionally, in the dead season of the year, betake themselves, in South Belgravia. No. 54, Hillary Street, has been recommended to Mrs. Brudenell as a place of temporary sojourn by a friend whose eulogiums on the landlady's skill as a cook had decided the lady, whose somewhat invidious remarks upon the chimney decorations of the drawing-room are quoted

above, to engage for herself and two daughters the 'first-floor apartments,' together with an 'extra bedroom' under the leads.

The month is February, the hour 5 p.m., and the three ladies—to wit, Mrs. Brudenell, and her younger daughters—have just arrived in Hillary Street. They have come direct from Wroxbourne, and the many luxuries which they have enjoyed, free of cost, during a two months' stay in that well-appointed and hospitable country house, have not tended to render any of the party over well contented with the contrast which the surroundings in the new lodging present to their view. Mabel in especial, when she found herself condemned to sleep in the 'double-bedded' 'extra' room with Rosie, betrayed alarming symptoms of discontent and insubordination.

'It was a place,' she said, 'in which they would not put a dog at Wroxbourne. There was no fireplace, and Dr. Kennedy had said in December, when she had that dreadful cough, that her chest was delicate. It was too bad that everything should have been done for Vinca and nothing for them. Their income had been so lessened for her, that they were condemned to go back to miserable lodgings! It was too cruel. Who would come to see them now? She wished that she had never heard of Graye Street, although *there*

they had, at least, lived like respectable people, whereas now——'

'*Now*,' put in Mrs. Brudenell, with a fine turn of satire, for she was cross and tired, and the sofa on which she was seated seemed as though stuffed with stones. '*Now* you have that pleasant visit at your sister's house to think over; and I must say, Mabel,' leaning back on her 'couch of pain,' which, boasting as it did of a 'curved' seat, effectually prevented the repose of limb of which she stood in need, 'that for any failures of your own at Wroxbourne, it is yourself—not me—that you should blame. You had some really good chances. There was Sir Everard Coleman——'

'A fat stumpy man of forty! A regular muff, who could neither ride nor drive nor shoot! A man who went in for art, and yet had no more taste for, or knowledge of, music and painting than has a West Stonyshire clod.'

'Granted; but the man, who probably formed his opinions of your ideas concerning him from the flattering manner in which you gazed into his face, and the rapt attention with which you listened to his platitudes, must have thought, poor fellow, that you appraised him at his own worth. And then there was Lord Strathcarron, and last, not least, that delightful Republican, Mr. Scobell.'

Rosie, who is gazing at the reflection of her pretty features in one of the dingiest of convex mirrors, across the face of which a garland of wall-paper roses has, in slanting fashion, and probably to hide a crack, been pasted, laughs out gleefully, when her quick ears catch the sound of her old friend's name.

'I like that!' she says, facing round upon the disputants. 'I wonder, mamma, whom you will claim for Mabel as an admirer next. I consider,' she adds merrily, as she plants her lithe young person upon a rickety-looking music-stool, which she has drawn from the shelter of a venerable 'cottage' piano, 'that Mr. Scobell is my own especial and individual property. And now,' striking a few notes that rattle and jingle ominously, 'I am going to give you what dear old Mrs. Mainwaring used to call "a little music."'

'For Heaven's sake, stop!' exclaim with their fingers in their ears both her auditors. 'Do let us have a little peace,' continues Mrs. Brudenell, *sola;* 'besides, here is dinner at last!' as the 'general servant,' a coquettish-looking young person, places a soup-tureen on the previously 'laid' table, and informs the 'lodgers' that 'dinner is served.'

In primitive fashion and without ceremony

(for who, I ask, can be ceremonious when there has been neither change of *toilette* nor decorous man or woman servant to proclaim to waiting ears that the time for adjournment has arrived?) the ladies take their seats.

'No napkins! humph!' says Rosie, who, whipping off the cover of the tureen, adds with a comical grimace, 'and Liebig soup. Pah! How well I recollect the smell of it! No, thank you, Mabel; none for me. Memory—association—my feelings—Glenwyllt—don't you know—make me—prefer waiting for a chop; though I am sure, beforehand, that it will be blue inside, with a border of cold grease round the dish.'

Accustomed as she was to Rosie's whimsicalities and *bizarre* fashion of 'putting things,' Mrs. Brudenell, nevertheless, felt a tinge of alarm as she listened to the girl's 'wild' talk. What, and if there should be something between her and that dreadful American, whom they all, with the exception of Gerald Mainwaring, hated so cordially at Wroxbourne? He was nearly thirty years the girl's senior—old enough almost to be her grandfather, and yet there was about the man—and much as Mrs. Brudenell disliked him, she could not conceal from herself that so it was—a something which conveyed an impression that he possessed a strange and weird

power—a power that to any woman who chanced to fall under his spell might be irresistible. Mr. Scobell, in short, appeared to her to be one of those men who have the gift—whether an enviable one or otherwise is a doubtful question—of making both men and women *fear* him. With the former such fear is generally incompatible with even moderate liking, but with the other sex love, the most passionate and lasting, often takes its rise from an innate conviction on the woman's part that the man who has excited her interest is capable of conducting himself like a savage.

The American was decidedly an ugly man. With the exception of his eyes, which were dark and piercing, but which could look very soft and tender, he had not a good feature in his face. His frame, too, was large and ungainly, his beard and whiskers scanty, and his expression, in the opinion of most persons, saturnine and unpleasant.

'He looks not only as if he had committed a murder, but as if the crime which was on his conscience had been of a very aggravated and horrible description.'

Such had been the opinion enunciated concerning Rosie's admirer by one of the most influential and highly considered of the Wrox-

bourne guests. Lord Duart seldom gave utterance to his views and ideas on any subject—a peculiarity which, had he not been a viscount with a rent-roll of twenty-five thousand per annum, would probably have militated against his being so often, together with his wife, amongst the invited to rich men's houses. It was perhaps only natural, under the circumstances, that the 'sayings' of such a man should have weight; and thus it came about that Lord Duart's oracular remark concerning his fellow-guest was not only applauded, but repeated *ad nauseum* amongst the many who, for reasons of their own, viewed the Southerner with disfavour.

The effect which the *mot* produced on Rosie was precisely the reverse of what might reasonably have been expected. Feeling that it was not only spoken ill-naturedly, but had been listened to with the like unworthy motives, her partisanship with her maligned friend became more decidedly marked than ever. As an ill-used and persecuted individual, he was her hero now; for Rosie, in outspoken warmth of heart and generosity of nature, more nearly resembled her father than did any other of his children, Mary not excepted, who, though 'good as gold,' was not demonstrative, and was more capable of feeling quiet, enduring affection than of throwing herself

headlong into ill-considered acts of self-devotion of which *impulse* is too often the root and spring.

The bare idea of there being 'anything serious' between Rosie and the American filled, as I said before, Mrs. Brudenell's motherly bosom with dismay unutterable. If it had been Mabel now—Mabel, with her broad plebeian nose and oleaginous complexion—with whose charms Mr. Scobell had been smitten, it would have been rather a 'good thing' than otherwise; but Rosie, although not by many degrees so handsome as Gerald Mainwaring's wife, was improving every day in beauty, and the girl was but sixteen, and if—and if—— But, child almost as her young daughter was, Mrs. Brudenell shrunk from the ordeal of either questioning her as to her feelings towards the middle-aged American, or of giving her such counsel as from a more trusted and respected parent might have led to good results. There was a straightforward honesty in Rosie's character which was ever at silent but determined war with the tortuous, crooked policy which dictated so many of her mother's words and actions, and the latter, conscious probably in her inmost heart that so it was, felt herself disqualified from speaking with the authority which, in right of their relationship, should have been hers. And there was yet another reason for delay. It was

the recommencement, for this not especially well-assorted trio, of their cordially detested lodging-house life; and Rosie, who had of late developed a strong liking for the luxuries of existence, might possibly be driven, by absence of *tact* and general mismanagement, to put even a higher value than she had hitherto done on Mr. Scobell's attentions. It had been, when first they knew him, the universally-received opinion—how, or on what foundation formed, had never exactly appeared—that he was far from being that despised thing—a poor man. At Glanwyllt his gold had always been forthcoming to pay for boats and carriages, and for the various creature comforts in which the ladies staying at the boarding-house delighted; and at that time, Mrs. Brudenell's finances being at an especially low ebb, she, to own the truth, had sometimes almost thought it possible—provided always that Mr. Scobell's resources stood the test of investigation—that she might be induced to marry him herself. Absence of any reciprocity of feeling on the gentleman's part not only effectually prevented the necessity of any inquiry into the state of his affairs, but is sufficient to in some degree account for Mrs. Brudenell's dislike to a man to whom she had been indebted for not a few acts of kindness. That Rosie had not forgotten how

greatly at Glanwyllt she had profited by his liberality the worldly-minded mother felt well convinced, and when, after the 'chops' and walnut pickles had been removed, a 'bread-and-butter' pudding, half baked and sadly deficient in currants (Rosie's pet aversion), took their place, Mrs. Brudenell, whose own disgust at the fare set before her had been very great, well-nigh made up her mind that the provocation was sufficient to drive so wilful a girl as her young daughter into the arms of even a Mr. Scobell. For the present, therefore, she resolved rather to suffer in silence the discomfort of suspense than to drive Miss Rosie into the proverbially dangerous 'corner' of self-assertion.

But, although debarred through prudential motives from questioning the girl herself, Mrs. Brudenell was consoled with the reflection that she would soon have an ally at hand in the person of her daughter Vinca. Rosie had, since her visit to Wroxbourne, been growing fast in knowledge of the world and its ways; and this circumstance, which to a better woman than Mrs. Brudenell would have caused regret, was deemed by her to be decidedly advantageous, inasmuch as the counsels of the girl's married sister were likely to be more patiently listened to than those of the gentle 'Sister of Mercy' (for

Mary had recently entered a Protestant 'home,' and was devoting herself to the service of the sick and needy), whose influence over her warm-hearted but wilful youngest sister had formerly been great as it was beneficial.

Wroxbourne was just now entirely deserted, for Gerald Mainwaring, whose still idolized wife was expecting in March 'an addition to her family,' had hired, for the period of six months, a furnished 'family mansion' in Belgrave Square. The 'family' were due, as the rotund hall-porter had orders to inform its visitors, on the 10th of February. It was now the eighth day of that month. Parliament was to meet on the eleventh, and the Brudenells had been nearly a week in Hillary Street. With the anticipated arrival of their rich relations, the certainty of London becoming fuller, and the cheering hope of gaieties to come, the three ladies, whose hard fate had again condemned them to the endurance of lodging-house discomforts, began to see a break in the clouds which lowered over their sky.

CHAPTER X.

'Whether the charmer sinner it, or saint it,
If folly grow romantic, I must paint it.'

POPE.

'I TOLD you so! I knew exactly how it would be. Vinca treats us exactly like poor relations. I was certain that if we were in a lodging she would never take the trouble to come near us, and oh! what a treat it would have been if she had lent us her carriage to-day.'

Mrs. Brudenell and Mabel had just returned from a long and fatiguing walk. Their bourne had been Tottenham Court Road, and they had 'done' the distance, with the exception of a 'shilling's worth' of cab fare, entirely on foot. On their return—weary and footsore—their way led them through Belgrave Square, where the sight of Vinca's luxurious open carriage and high-stepping bays being driven slowly home to the stables hard by did not tend to improve

the tempers of the ladies. Heavily did the elder of the two mount the steep Hillary Street stairs, feeling, poor lady, as sad at heart as had done the old mad king when, after giving up all to his ungrateful daughters, he felt the sharp bite of the worse than 'serpent's tooth.' Wistfully did she glance over the big round table that stood in the centre of the room, in the hope that a card of her rich daughter's might be lying there; but she looked in vain! Not a morsel of pasteboard upon that dingy, ink-stained cover proclaimed the fact that she and hers were not wholly 'by the world forgot,' for truly Solomon knew the world and human nature well when he wrote the words, 'The poor is hated even of his own neighbour; but the rich hath many friends.'

But notwithstanding the bitterness which was surging in her breast, the time had not yet arrived when Mrs. Brudenell could be expected to make the humiliating confession that in sacrificing so much for one daughter she was conscious of having acted wrongly towards the others. Vinca had ever been, and indeed was still, in spite of neglect and worldliness and ingratitude, her favourite child. Rosie might hereafter, but that would depend upon circumstances, run her hard; but in the meantime, she

—mother-like, and also from *amour propre* and a dislike to being convicted of having been weak of judgment—took up the defence of Gerald's wife.

'You are wrong,' she began, when Mabel, having flung herself on one of the least uncomfortable of the arm-chairs, concluded her *jérémiade* with an audible yawn, 'in saying that Vinca *never* comes here. And besides, you should remember how many people she has to see——'

'She would have few enough if she were as poor as we are——'

'And then her health—her situation——'

'Her *situation* indeed! With all those delicious carriages! And living, too, so close by! It is nothing in the world but that she is too *fine*—too set up to have anything to do with us. I have seen it coming on ever since Lady Arabella began to notice her. She knows such a number of great people now, that her relations, who have beggared themselves on her account, are not thought worth being commonly civil to. I positively believe that, but for Gerald, she would cut us altogether.'

'Nonsense! Why attribute to design what is only the effect of thoughtlessness, and on her having on first coming to town a great deal to do and to think about?'

'Gerald must have quite as much to think about,' Mabel says sulkily, as she mechanically strokes the fur of her cheap muff, remembering the while Vinca's envied sables, 'and yet *he* finds time to call.'

'And so do other people,' puts in Rosie from her place upon the hearth-rug, where she had been reading 'Guy Livingstone' by the fire-light, 'for *I* had a visitor, and one who had plenty of time to give me, too, for he stayed—oh, I can't tell you how long, but more than an hour, I am sure.'

She is sitting, as I have said, on the hearth-rug; her small hands, reddened by the fire-glow, which has also coloured one of her smooth cheeks to the hue of a peony, are clasped round her knees, and her childlike face, as she glances archly at her companions, looks both wilful and amused.

'A visitor! What *do* you mean? Not surely——' Mrs. Brudenell is beginning, but she is interrupted by Rosie saying, with irritating composure:

'Yes, my dear mamma, it was *surely* that very party——'

'*Party!*' strikes in Mabel crossly, for the notion that the child (as she is still called) should have received a visitor during her

absence annoys her greatly. 'I do wish, Rosie, that you would not use such vulgar words. It is too atrocious to speak of a gentleman as a *party*. Only vulgar people ever think of doing so.'

'But what was I to do? And how was I to call him?' asks Rosie, as with her blue eyes dancing with mirth she sways her lissom form backwards and forwards slowly. 'You all said at Wroxbourne—no, not *quite* all, that's a mistake of mine—that Mr. Scobell was not a gentleman——'

'Oh, then it is Mr. Scobell who has behaved so little like what *we* in England call a gentleman, as to pay you, a young lady not *out*, a long visit when she had no chaperone—no companion—no protector near her! Just the thing to make a girl talked about! I never heard of such conduct before, but it is Gerald's fault for encouraging him as he did at Wroxbourne. To-morrow I shall remind him to be more careful, and, in short, shall tell him to look well into the characters of the men whom he thinks of introducing to his sisters.'

'Oh mamma!' exclaims Mabel in alarm. 'Don't you think that *would* be a mistake? Men do so hate advice and botheration——'

'Besides, dear mamma,' said flippant Rosie,

'if you *must* advise and bother anyone, let that one be "Maryhanne." You see, as our establishment is not yet correctly *montée*, some few social mistakes are likely to occur. Maryhanne had, I regret to say, not yet cleaned herself when she took me quite by surprise by announcing—what do you think?—a "party!" You must really take her in hand, Mabel. A civil inquiry like that—don't you remember it?—which the owner of this house made of mamma when we came to look at it, would be *so* useful. "I beg your pardon, 'm, but am I a-talking to a lady or a mam?" How extra civil she would have been if we had had handles to our names! but then, wouldn't she have taken it out in the coals! Now, if Maryhanne had only thought of asking Mr. Scobell if he were a——'

But before Miss Rosie can give utterance to the words of youthful wisdom with which she is primed, a knock at the house-door startles her into silence. It is late, as Mrs. Brudenell suggests, for callers, and Rosie's cheerful exclamation of 'Better late than never,' remains unheard in the slight confusion which follows the announcement by 'Maryhanne' that Mr. Mainwaring is 'below.'

'Oh! ask him to come up, *do*,' Mabel says emphatically, whereupon Gerald, looking, as is his

wont, a splendid specimen of prosperous, handsome manhood, enters upon the scene, and shakes hands cordially with his wife's 'poor relations.'

'I am come,' he says with the genial smile of a guest who knows himself to be well worth a welcome, 'to give you the afternoon bulletin of Vinca's health——'

'She enjoyed her drive, I hope?' Mrs. Brudenell, who is too much out of temper to be polite, says drily. 'We met her carriage empty, as we were walking home.'

'Did you? It was a charming day, so Vinca, I am happy to say, drove as far as Wimbledon. Dr. Crosthwaite says that she cannot be too much in the air. It was like spring, she says, in the country. All the leaves bursting out, and the sun reminding her of June.'

'We, that is Mabel and I,' rejoins Mrs. Brudenell, 'found it a great deal too hot in London, and I doubt very much, if Vinca had had to walk to Tottenham Court Road and back, as we had, whether she would have thought the weather so very delightful.'

Gerald's conscience, for he is thoroughly good-natured, and his shortcomings arise far more from 'want of thought' than from 'want of heart,' smites him in a moment, and he rises at once to the bait thus dexterously thrown.

'I wish I had known. *Pray*, dear Mrs. Brudenell, do not let such a thing happen again. Vinca so seldom uses the brougham, especially in the daytime, that if you would only send word in the morning to say when it would be wanted, the carriage would be entirely at your service.'

'Oh thanks! You good fellow!' exclaims Rosie joyously, whilst the gratitude of Mrs. Brudenell for the favour, to obtain which she had so successfully angled, is far less warmly expressed.

With every desire to conciliate her son-in-law, and to make him in all possible ways of use, she could hardly disguise her displeasure at the manner in which the offer of the carriage had been made. She had been forced, having no other alternative, to *almost* ask for what ought to have been voluntarily offered; and then such deplorable want of tact on Gerald's part! He had made no attempt to conceal the fact that it was solely to the absence on Vinca's part of any desire to use the brougham that she (Mrs. Brudenell) would owe the carrying out of her son-in-law's good intentions. Happily, however, for the harmony of the party, Gerald, excepting when his 'affections' were in question, was neither an observant nor a susceptible

character. The girls had been profuse in their acknowledgments, and until Maryanne from her 'coin of vantage' on a chair had set the gas above the big round table a flaring, there had been in the room too little light for the gloom on Mrs. Brudenell's countenance to be plainly discernible. Her displeasure, however, was not an abiding feeling, for soon her heart, as was apt indeed to be the case with all who knew him, warmed towards the unassuming, kindly-natured young fellow, whose striking beauty of face and person had neither stirred him to self-admiration, nor awakened in him the instincts of a sensualist. He was not a brilliant character. Conversation was not his forte, but the silence of Gerald Mainwaring was an intelligent taciturnity, and far from proceeding from that most frequent of all causes—namely, the want of something to say. He was indolent, and he was happy! Necessity for exertion there existed in his case none, and therefore, yielding to a peculiarity in his nature which he inherited, together with a cheerful *insouciance*, from his African progenitors, the inertness that should have been from his youth upwards strenuously warred against grew upon him as the years rolled on.

Mr. Scobell, who appreciated his good qualities, and saw with regret in his character defects which

were, he believed, in a great measure the outcome of a faulty education and a plethora of life's good things, had endeavoured, and that not wholly without good results, to rouse his young host not only into physical but into mental exertion. Gerald's love of reading, and his zeal in the acquirement of knowledge, were great and praiseworthy; 'but,' argued his mentor, 'to what end and with what object are you heaping up these stores of learning? If not for some useful purpose, some benefit to the many whose well-being must in some degree be affected by the conduct of a man possessed of wealth and influence such as yours, I see no object, excepting—pray excuse the liberty I am taking—the gratification of your own dislike to exertion, in this poring over books, and collecting in your brain the wisdom and the wit of other men.'

Under the influence of his outspoken American friend, Gerald began to, in some degree, shake off the supineness which had been fast growing into a fixed and unconquerable habit. He had borne with imperturbable good-humour the mild chaffings of his guest, when, preferring the warmth and snugness of the library to woodcock-killing under the dripping trees, he had allowed the sport-loving amongst the Wroxbourne 'shooting-party' to sally forth without him; but when the

American, with no sparing hand, dwelt on the contempt which so many women feel for men who have no taste for manly pursuits, who hang about in drawing-rooms and boudoirs whilst their fellow-beings are fulfilling the end for which so many are apparently created—namely, that of 'killing something'—a chord of feeling in the young man's breast was touched. He could remember—or fancied that so it was—more than one speaking glance from Vinca's sapphire-hued eyes, when he had (could she—the thought was dreadful—have deemed it an intrusion?) lingered in her morning-room after the other men had donned their shooting-jackets and sallied forth, to appear no more (as is the wont of their kind) until the evening. And he—well, he had been obtuse, stupid, and had run the risk of wearying his beautiful wife with his perpetual presence; but he had learned wisdom now, and henceforth he would do violence to his inclinations by entering with more apparent spirit into the out-of-door winter pastimes of his age. And he kept, with far more courage and perseverance than his friend had dared to hope for, the sensible resolves which he had formed. Being deficient neither in courage nor in address, it was simply the *premier pas* —the first effort—from which he shrank: for once on horseback, or at the covert-side, it would

have been difficult to point out a harder rider or a 'shot more 'straight' or more unerring than the popular owner of Wroxbourne Abbey.

The change in his habits did him good service with Vinca, for Mr. Scobell, when including her amongst the many women whose prejudices are in favour of 'sport'-loving men, had done her no injustice. She had, in point of fact, been at no especial pains to conceal her opinion on this subject from her husband, who, but for the proverbial blindness of love, could hardly have been so slow to notice the scarcely-veiled contempt which his stay-at-home habits provoked in her. But although he had (partly perhaps from the fact that Vinca, a selfishly-outspoken person always, had never been over-lavish towards him either of her caresses or her civil speeches) failed to understand the covert sneers which from time to time she had levelled at him, Gerald was quick-sighted enough to perceive that he had, since his change of habits, risen considerably in his wife's estimation. A vainer man, and one more given to self-assertion, would probably have felt aggrieved by the evident pleasure which the lady displayed at having *now* her 'morning hours' to herself; but this husband—a pattern one, as all my female readers must allow—could see no fault in Vinca. She was, in his eyes, the

one perfect creature that the world contained. From the moment when his dazzled eyes had first rested upon her, he had committed the irreparable folly of accepting the position of her inferior—'Dans l'amour il y a toujours un qui embrasse, et l'autre qui tend la joue'—and great had been the power which Gerald's attitude towards her had placed in the hands of a woman who loved the act of ruling to her heart's core; and she had doubtless, in some respects, used that power mercilessly; latterly, however, the young wife had, both in appearance and reality, begun to appreciate more according to his deserts the husband to whom she owed so many of the worldly blessings she enjoyed. Her own spirits, owing probably to the 'situation' in which she found herself, were not at their normally cheerful height. Dr. Crossthwaite, a famous man in his line, without whose aid and counsel many a great lady felt assured that she would never be enabled to weather her 'woman's penalty' in safety, had strongly recommended for his patient, not only a horizontal posture, but the absence of all unnecessary excitement. Her daily visitors were to be few, and there was to be an end of evening amusements until after the event which, as it was hoped and expected, would culminate in the birth of a son and heir to the great Wroxbourne property.

It was under these circumstances that Vinca, tired of her mother's society, and satiated with the mild sensationalisms contained in the three volume novels which (for she had not been trained to prefer wholesomer and more solid mental food) were by her daily devoured, turned with something approaching to gratitude to the handsome, sympathizing husband, who was so much more than willing to devote himself, his time, and his every thought to her amusement. The patience, untiring as it was genuine, with which he listened to her perpetual complaints, and to her never-ending calls upon his attention, was a constant source of wonder to Mrs. Brudenell, whilst Lady Arabella, when she occasionally vouchsafed a visit to her grandson's wife, felt simply provoked that Gerald should, as she to her intimates phrased it, be making such a 'milksop of himself.'

CHAPTER XI.

'By whatsoever name we call
The ruling tyrant, Self is all in all.'
CHURCHILL.

In the meanwhile, and pending the more cheerful and animated season when Mrs. Mainwaring, in renovated health and spirits, would be enabled once more to enter heart and soul into the 'gaieties' from which she had been of late debarred, Mr. Scobell had far more frequent opportunities of 'talking nonsense' (to borrow Mrs. Brudenell's words) to Rosie than that young lady's prudent mamma considered at all desirable. The 'Yankee,' as so many ignorant persons persisted in calling him, had, to own the truth, fallen as foolishly in love as any stripling of twenty might have done with the pretty, true-hearted girl who, in the simplicity of her tender years, had been perfectly unconscious of the effect which her flattering admiration of his

talents, and her undisguised liking for himself, might have upon her quadragenarian admirer. Had Mr. Scobell been but ten years younger, and had his personal appearance not been so very much, as all her acquaintances remarked, 'against him,' the girl's innate modesty and sense of decorum would have prevented her from so openly manifesting the enjoyment which she felt in his society; but with a friend so old, so gaunt, so singular-looking as her old boarding-house acquaintance, Rosie felt, without reasoning on the matter, that she could chatter and laugh as unreservedly and as happily as she chose.

Mr. Scobell was, as Mrs. Brudenell in her irritation often complained, a man whom it was impossible to shake off. He never seemed, she averred, to understand that his presence was unwelcome, and, seeing that the lady, though far from being, as a general rule, deficient in courage, did not feel equal to the task of forbidding him her house, the obnoxious visitor 'came and went' very much according to the dictates of his own will. The influence which in some mysterious manner he had acquired over Gerald Mainwaring increased rather than diminished, and was certainly in no degree owing to a cause similar to that which had lain at the bottom of Mrs. Brudenell's quasi-toleration of

the American's visits. It was to Gerald a matter of no importance (at least, so, if he had given it a serious thought, he might possibly have told himself) whether Mr. Scobell was or was not the intimate friend, as indeed circumstances pointed him out to be, of the beautiful and far-famed Princess Wolkersdorf. That lady, together with her daughter, the young Princess Dacia, and a 'numerous suite,' were shortly expected in London. A mansion in Grosvenor Square—one of those 'noble' abodes which impecunious peers occasionally find it convenient to let furnished, had been engaged till the end of the forthcoming season for the 'distinguished foreigners,' whose reputed wealth, together with an amount of beauty for which many English visitors of taste and discrimination who had met them in Continental Southern cities could vouch, caused their approaching advent to make no small sensation in the London world of fashion.

Amongst those who looked forward with something more than curiosity to the coming of the Princess was Mrs. Brudenell. She was, as we have seen, an ambitious woman, and the soarings of her imagination took the not uncommon form of causing her to crave, with an intensity which only just stopped short of monomania, for a far higher place on the social ladder

than any to which she had hitherto climbed. This eager hankering, unworthy in itself, and likely to lead to mortifying consequences, owed its birth to the intimacy, now fairly established as a fact, which existed between the till now obnoxious American and the Princess Wolkersdorf. To be 'first in the field' as an acknowledged friend of one who was about, as all the world knew, to be received with open arms by the 'highest personages of the land,' was now the chief aim and purpose of Mrs. Brudenell's existence. Could this object be attained she would, she told herself, be rewarded for the patience with which she had endured the presence of the 'odious Republican,' whose *attentions* to Rosie had latterly become so marked as to, under other circumstances, call aloud for family interference. But she could not afford to affront him now! On *his* introduction, *his* good word with the great lady who had chosen him for her friend, depended all her own hopes for success. For the moment Rosie's affairs must remain in abeyance. Of course, the silly intimacy which had grown up between her and the American was one of which she could not approve; but then, the opening! the chances which it would afford to both the girls of making even better matches than that which had fallen to Vinca's lot, were matters of such primary

importance that her own comfort, her own likes and dislikes, must for the time being be set aside as things of no importance. A desire for the general good of the family must alone, at this crisis, actuate her conduct.

It is early in March, and two men, one young and the other middle-aged, are standing together, silent and absorbed, on the foot-pavement in Oxford Street. That busy thoroughfare is comparatively quiet now. 'The night is far spent,' but on what remains thereof a moon so big, so round, and so dazzling in its brightness, is shining down, that the artificial light of the gas-lamps is absolutely, to use an every-day expression, 'put out' by the grand white globe that is sailing across the heavens. The two men, who are none other than Gerald Mainwaring and his American friend, have been dining together in the neighbourhood of Lancaster Gate. The former had accepted the invitation reluctantly, for Vinca's hour of trial was near at hand, and he was very averse to leaving, for any considerable space of time, the near neighbourhood of Belgrave Square. In the present instance it was in obedience to his wife's wishes that he accepted Lady Duart's invitation. She wanted, she said, to be amused by his account of the party. It

was so odd that the Duarts had invited Mr. Scobell. They had seemed quite to dislike him at Wroxbourne. Perhaps, however, it was because of this wonderful Princess Wolkersdorf, of whom everyone was talking.

'And Gerald,' she went on to say, 'you must be sure to remember all you hear about her. I shall be up and awake when you come back, for I feel *so* well!—As well,' she repeated with a smile, 'as if there were nothing the matter with me.'

The guests at Lord Duart's dinner had been well selected; the 'time' had proved a pleasant one, and our two friends had, in the agreeable society in which they found themselves, lingered longer than Gerald had either intended or been aware of. And now—for as we know it was not this young man's habit to be prompt—the two were lingering still! Lingering, inasmuch as the American, whose quickness of observation was only equalled by his intense admiration for beauty in its every form and phase, had begged his companion to pause for a moment at that part of the great thoroughfare, where a view can be obtained of the curve in the street that leads towards High Holborn.

'It is not only Melrose Abbey,' said Scobell,

'which to be "seen aright," should be visited "by the pale moonlight." Under such a clear grey sky as this, and with such a lamp as that above burning in the heavens, streets and palaces and bridges are as fair to look at as the finest works'—raising his hat reverently—'that God has made. This is not the first time that in the stillness of a night like this I have stood on this same spot, and have told myself that even in ugly London the works of man are sometimes good to look at.'

'Thanks for showing me this sight,' said Gerald dreamily; 'I remember driving years ago, with my dear father and mother, by moonlight over the Roman bridges, and the impression which the spectacle then made upon me has never faded from my memory. Little did I then think, however, how vividly it would be, by a street of, as you justly say, "ugly London," recalled to my mind."

'The sight, and the stillness together—those serried ranks of tall white houses—for white they look under this silvery light, and the strange thought which will obtrude itself, that four millions of human beings are living as well as dying round us, almost necessarily recall to the reflecting mind those lines of your Nature-loving poet, Wordsworth, from whose teeming

imagination the spectacle of the "gliding" Thames at night drew forth the words—

> '"Great God! the very houses seem asleep,
> And all that mighty heart is lying still!"

Still, but ah, how dangerous!' he, after a pause, during which they walked slowly onward, resumed. 'At this very moment, and within a stone's throw of us, what strange, mysterious tragedies, what "deeds of dreadful note"—deeds, the perpetration of which may never be brought to light—are probably being, under the shadow of night, enacted! The breath of man is morally, as well as physically, poisonous to his fellows. We know not, dear boy' (and the hand which rested on Gerald's arm pressed it kindly as he said the words) 'what a day or an hour may bring forth, and well is it for finite human beings, that of the future which is in store for us we are so darkly—blindly ignorant.'

There was in the tone and manner of the man a something so entirely at variance with his accustomed easy composure, that Gerald, who was nervous by temperament, and whose imagination required but small encouragement to set it working, was struck by a wholly unreasoning fear that his friend, who by the occasional strangeness of his remarks and queries had from

time to time not a little puzzled him, had now something on his mind which he desired and yet dreaded to communicate. It was a curious circumstance, and one not unworthy of note, that he then for the first time remembered how little he really knew of the character and antecedents of the man with whom he had gradually become so intimate. For aught he knew, this singular-looking and decidedly eccentric American might be of the number of those of whom he himself had spoken, when he alluded to men whose deeds would not bear the light of day. He might be—but no—he (Gerald) would not dwell upon such possibilities. Thoughts and surmises such as these were unpleasant, and he would strangle them in the birth; besides, seeing that he, in his own person, was so richly endowed by Providence with every good gift—with health and wealth and youth, and a fair wife who loved him—did he not, in that he was so ready to suspect another, betray black ingratitude towards the Giver of all good things? Could he, moreover, either forget or ignore the fact that Westhrop Scobell bore on his marked and expressive features signs so unmistakable, that those who ran might read them, that in the fierce battle of life he had not escaped unscathed? What temptations might he not

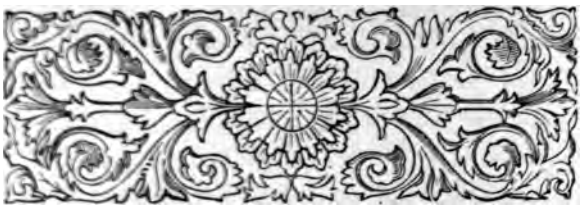
have struggled against, and what fiery trials might he not have undergone, whilst he (Gerald), reared in the lap of luxury, and carefully guarded from the great and manifold temptations which assail the needy and the friendless, was presuming to question the excellence which he might hope in vain to emulate.

He was aroused from the short-lived reverie into which these reflections had thrown him by a remark from his companion that the watch of the latter having played him the shabby trick of stopping, he—Mr. Scobell—was ignorant of the hour. At that moment, as if in answer to the unspoken question, 'Big Ben' broke the solemn stillness of the night by booming forth the single stroke which announced to the world of London that a new day was already sixty minutes old. The sound was effectual in rousing Gerald from his waking dream.

'Good Heavens!' he in his utter dismay exclaimed. 'What can I have been thinking of? I had not the faintest notion that it was so late! Vinca must have been expecting me hours ago.'

He had quickened his pace almost to a run, when, fortunately, a prowling 'hansom' turned the corner of a neighbouring street, and a loud whistle speedily brought the driver thereof to the rescue. Without a word uttered by either, the

two men jumped in, and were driven best pace to Belgrave Square; Mr. Scobell's bachelor lodgings were in Wilton Street, the near neighbourhood to her own of the American's temporary residence having been frequently made a 'grievance' of by Vinca. The *pushing* propensities of her *bête noir* were, she had declared, much too disagreeable to be by her patiently tolerated.



CHAPTER XII.

'Who does the best his circumstance allows
Does well, acts nobly; angels could do no more.'
YOUNG, *Night Thoughts.*

AT the turn from Grosvenor Place to Wilton Street, Mr. Scobell, with a cordial 'Good-night, my dear boy, and I hope you will find all well at home,' left Gerald to pursue his way alone. A very few minutes took the latter to Belgrave Square, where a shock awaited him; for, to his surprise and alarm, a carriage which he at once recognised as that of Dr. Crossthwaite was standing at the door. Of course the idea at once occurred to him that a premature confinement had taken place, and that the life of his adored Vinca was in danger! With one bound therefore he was in the hall, and there found himself confronted by the great *medico* in person. The latter was buttoning his overcoat, his duties,

for the time being, having ended, and in another moment he would have taken his departure.

'All happily over,' was, as they shook hands, his opening remark to the agitated husband. 'Excellent *time*—only an hour ill; Mrs. Mainwaring would not hear of your being sent for. But,' the courteous 'ladies' doctor' after a pause added, 'will you permit me a few minutes' private conversation? This room is perhaps disengaged.' And he moved a few steps nearer to a closed door as he spoke.

Dr. Crossthwaite's manner, although professionally calm, was nevertheless marked with so much solemnity that to one already unnerved and overwrought it immediately conveyed the impression that some disastrous intelligence had by him to be communicated; the idea was far from reassuring, but, striving his utmost to at least *seem* unconcerned and tranquil, Gerald followed his leader into the large dining-room, which was dimly lighted by a small lamp that had been placed upon a distant table. Both men were standing, for in his agitation the master of the house forgot to be polite, and the doctor (for what medical practitioner ever admits, even by implication, that he has leisure on his hands?) entered immediately, although with evident distaste, on the business in hand.

'I sincerely hope, my dear sir,' he said, and his well-trained voice betrayed not a little of the would-be consoling sympathy with which he was wont to listen to his fair patients' *jérémiades*, 'that you will not be very much—ahem—cut up by what I have to tell you. The child is strong and healthy, apparently—but—and its being a boy may, I am afraid, rather complicate things.'

'Good Heavens!' exclaimed Gerald, to whom suspense was becoming unendurable, and who could no longer listen patiently to his companion's hesitating remarks. 'Tell me the truth at once. Is the child a monster?'

'No, no, not so bad, not nearly so bad,' was the soothingly intended reply. 'On the contrary, he is a very fine little fellow. But dark, *very* dark,' shaking his big grey head solemnly. 'And I would recommend as a precautionary measure that Mrs. Mainwaring be kept for the present from seeing the infant. It can easily be done—any pretence will serve; but in her weak state—however, no one could possibly be doing better, and to-morrow morning I shall call and inquire after my patient. Good-night, my dear sir, and accept my congratulations on the event being over so happily!'

He had vanished, and was seated comfortably

in his brougham before Gerald had had time to recover from the kind of stupor into which the last suggestion concerning Vinca had thrown him.

'She is not to see the child! Then it must be, indeed, something frightful to look upon,' such was his unspoken thought, whilst Dr. Crossthwaite, pulling up the window of his carriage, and settling a woollen comforter round his throat, said almost audibly:

'Poor young fellow! I am afraid I did not prepare him sufficiently for the shock. Why, the child—God help them all—is as black as my hat!'

Gerald's first impulse when he was left alone in the cold, empty-looking room, in which he had during a few moments so greatly suffered, was to hurry to his wife's bedside. He longed, as never he had seemed to long before, for the sight of her beautiful face, and for one of those almost tender looks which, since she had grown weaker and more gentle, the husband who loved her with such absorbing passion had been not unfrequently favoured with. On tiptoe, and very slowly as he approached the door, did he advance, and then noiselessly turning the handle, he came suddenly face to face with Mrs. Brudenell. A smile was on her matronly lip, and also

a warning finger as she made a sign to him to retreat; then, immediately following, she closed, without fastening, the door behind her, and said in a whisper:

'She is doing beautifully, but we must keep her quiet. *I* have only been here five minutes. So unlucky that I was dining out! It is delightful that it should be a boy! And a fine child, too, the nurse says. I have not seen it; neither has dear Vinca. Dr. Crossthwaite said——'

But at that moment a feeble voice, calling Gerald's name, was heard, and the tender husband, unmoved by his mother-in-law's remonstrances, at once responded to the appeal.

'My darling,' he whispered, as he bent over her and touched the pure white forehead with his lips, 'you have suffered and I was not here! I cannot forgive myself for having stayed out so late. You *should* have sent for me, my sweet one,' he added whisperingly, as with gentle touch he smoothed back a stray glossy curl from her low brow, looking so fondly at her the while that Mrs. Brudenell, unsympathizing though she was by nature, found it hard to send him from her daughter's side.

It had, however, to be done. Duty was duty, and Vinca's health the first consideration; so,

with only the memory of the invalid's smile and kiss to comfort him, Gerald made his way, with what reluctance only himself could have told, to the room in which the nurse, together with his little son, were to be found. At the risk of lowering my poor hero in the reader's opinion, I must reveal the melancholy truth that he dreaded meeting the eyes of the former even more than he feared to look upon the unfortunate little being of which Mrs. Craik, the portly monthly nurse, had temporary charge. On the occasion of Claudia's birth, Gerald had been dimly conscious that the same important functionary whom he was now about to visit had shown decided disapproval of the sallowness of the newly-born infant's skin. Mrs. Craik, whose line of business lay, as she boasted, almost entirely with titled 'ladies,' enjoyed, by her own account, a speciality for assisting only well-looking infants into the world. The small Lord Georges and Lady Lauras of whose perfections she boasted were not only numerous, but very '*fair* to see;' and so completely indeed was it her habit to address 'her ladies' as 'Milady' or 'your Grace,' that it came, she would graciously explain to the upper servants of the house, 'quite awk'ard,' when in a 'plain gentleman's'

service, to drop the titles of which she was so much accustomed to make use.

It was this dignified personage with whom Gerald was now called upon to have an audience. An audience, too, whilst she held in her arms a child of his, the mere sight of which (at least so had declared the doctor) was likely to produce injurious effects upon its mother! It was an ordeal from which his whole being shrank, but with that shrinking, and despite a certain dread, of which he felt ashamed, of seeing the little creature who *might* in truth be a revolting spectacle, a keen desire to know before he slept the *worst* urged him forward, and drew his laggard footsteps towards the nurse's door. The room was not only very near to, but communicated with, that of the lady of the house, and perfect silence reigned within it. On one side of the fire-place was a rosy-cheeked, healthy-looking young woman, who, sitting bolt upright on a chair which had no pretensions to be called an easy one, held on her lap a bundle which, as Gerald rightly guessed, represented no less a personage than his son and heir. Mrs. Craik had established herself in a comfortable arm-chair near the door of communication—left purposely ajar—that led to the sick-room; but on Mr. Mainwaring's entrance she rose majestically, and

performed a courtesy which, in her own opinion, would not even in the presence of majesty have been out of place. Then, to Gerald's hurried 'good-evening,' she replied in a low and studiously lugubrious tone:

'I am glad, sir, that you have come to see the child; and it would be a relief to my feelings if Mrs. Brudenell would do as much. In course, Dr. Crossthwaite is a gentleman as can't be mistaken, but the infant is not, to my thinking, satisfactory—not by any manner of means satisfactory, and if you, sir, will be so good' (drawing herself up and puffing out her ample bosom, as if in protest against the act of *asking* as a favour that which she might have claimed as a right) 'as to examine the baby——'

'But, Mrs. Craik, I am no judge; I know really nothing about young children——' Gerald is beginning; but his disclaimer is totally unregarded: already, at a sign from the nursery autocrat, is the ominous-looking small bale unfurled, and the features of the 'little stranger' exposed to view.

And strange enough, and looking truly as though it 'came from afar,' the aspect of that long-wished-for child. '*Very* dark,' as the doctor had said; nay, looking almost *black* in contrast with its snow-white surroundings—is

the tiny face on which Gerald gazes in profoundest, saddest horror. He is, by the astounding sight, literally stricken into silence, and Mrs. Craik's maunderings on the subject fall on utterly unheeding ears.

'In all my practice,' she is saying, 'which I have helped at the births of near upon five score, and all of 'em come of lords and ladies and carriage-people, I never cast my eyes upon the like of this one. Says I to myself at first, "Sure it must be the heart, and there ain't no cirkilation;" but the doctor he bundled it into my arms without a word, good or bad (for fear as its mamma should see it, I suppose), so then I knew for certain that, barring the colour of the skin, there was nothing the matter with the child.'

'But what can be the reason? What, in heaven's name, can have occasioned this horrible misfortune?' Gerald at length finds breath to say. 'Is there any hope,' he adds hesitatingly, 'that it—will—go off? Get better, I mean? Children change, don't they, sometimes?' And the look of pitiful appeal in his dark eyes causes even the monthly nurse to almost pity him.

'My dear good gentleman,' she says, and her voice is not altogether without a touch of kindly feeling, 'there is no manner of use in trying to

deceive you. The poor infant must remain as God made it, for whatever is the good—as you as is a scholard must know—of striving to *wash a blackymore white?*'

At that trying moment, and when the 'last feather' was doing for Gerald its normal work, Mrs. Brudenell's voice, low-pitched, because of the proximity of the invalid, was heard at the door of communication, calling the nurse away. At the sound, Gerald started as though he had received a pistol-shot. Not for 'worlds' would he, at that moment, have encountered his mother-in-law, and right glad was he that the need for his doing so did not just then exist. Through the door opening into the corridor he rushed, his brain on fire, and his two hands pressed hard against his forehead. To reach his own bedroom, and to lock himself safely therein, was the work but of a few moments. Then, and not till then, did he begin to recover, not only his breath, but the rightful command of his senses. Then it was that with his spirit crushed and his mind bewildered, he found in the pictured smile of a fair woman a ray of comfort. It was the sight of Lilian Fielden's portrait—the portrait of his believed-in mother—which did him that service; for gazing on that sainted face, with its soft, tender eyes meeting his in the fulness of a

parent's love, could he fail to find consolation in the thought, that to one so purely, delicately fair, he—the father of the poor unfortunate one on whom his eyes had lately rested—owed his birth?

CHAPTER XIII.

'The honest heart that's free frae a'
Intended fraud or guile,
However Fortune kick the ba',
Has aye some cause to smile.'

BURNS.

EARLY on the following morning, and after passing an almost sleepless night, Gerald received a message from his mother-in-law to the effect that she desired to speak to him with the least possible delay. He had been expecting the summons, and yet when it came, such was the peace-loving, indolent nature of the man, that it acted on his nervous temperament like a shock. With something approaching to a groan, for was not this the beginning of the troubles that were in store for him? he commenced, not hurriedly, for he would gladly have postponed the *mauvais quart d'heure* through which he had to pass—the process of dressing. Mrs. Brudenell, lavish as she

had been towards him of smiles and honeyed words, had never succeeded in gaining either his affection or his esteem. His truthful and delicately refined nature revolted from all that was false, as well as coarse and hard, in the idiosyncrasy of Vinca's mother. He had often, but altogether in vain, reproached himself in that he could not feel towards her as a son; and facts being as they were, it is hardly surprising that he should have looked forward with no pleasurable feelings to the coming interview.

Much, however, and painfully as he shrinks from it, his one *really* absorbing fear is the effect which the sight of her child may produce upon Vinca. It is that fear which causes his strong young hand to tremble slightly as he passes the brush through the clustering locks of his brown hair, and which sets his heart beating with almost painful violence as a tap at the door makes itself suddenly heard. It is a tap given by impatient fingers, and the candidate for admission, scarcely waiting for leave to enter, rushes headlong into the room and throws herself into Gerald's arms. It is Rosie, and between tears and laughter, for excitement has rendered her almost hysterical, she finds some difficulty in explaining herself.

'I ran from Hillary Street,' she at length contrives to say, 'directly Jane told me this

morning about Vinca. I wanted so much to see the baby, and now it—it—Oh, Gerald dear, you must not think, because I laugh, that I do not feel for you! I was so shocked and frightened that I hardly knew at first what I did.'

'Poor little thing!' Gerald says soothingly, and then, with gentle hands, placing the agitated girl upon a chair, he endeavours to speak the comfort which he is far from feeling. 'You must not fret. I dare say that it will all come right in time. It is about Vinca that I am most afraid. To her it will be such a dreadful shock!'

Rosie's short upper lip curls at this marital remark suggestively.

'I wouldn't waste much feeling over Vinca, if I were you,' she rejoins quietly. 'She will be—well—annoyed at first, of course; but she has no real love for children. I don't believe that she has ever cared as much for little Claudie as I do. All the same,' she continues, after a pause, during which Gerald hustles himself into his morning-coat, 'it is all most miserable, and all the more so because of Mr. Scobell having gone away to Paris to bring back that horrible Princess Wolkersdorf.'

'Ah, yes! He told me he was going, and I am sorry, dear, if you are, but I do not really

know what good he could have done us here.'

'Oh, that is because you have not discovered half his wisdom, or a quarter of how much he can do! Why, he can even keep mamma in order, and it isn't everyone, as we must all allow, who can do *that.*'

'No, indeed!' Gerald replies mechanically, and then, in a more wide-awake tone, adds, 'But I mustn't wait, dear; your mother has sent for me, and she will think I mean to shirk coming.'

'Which I would, if I were you,' the girl with a sententious nod of her pretty head responds, 'for she is awfully cross to-day. Furious with me for coming here; and especially so for having come by myself! As if anything could happen to me at nine in the morning between this and Hillary Street! She thinks that I went away at once, so I shall wait till you have seen her: and then make tracks for home.'

Mrs. Brudenell's opening remark, when her son-in-law met her in the drawing-room, proved sufficiently startling. She was looking, too, as Rosie had said, undeniably cross; nevertheless, she seated herself with dignity, and held her head, on which was perched a rather over-juvenile bonnet, well aloft.

'I conclude,' she said stiffly, 'that *you* cannot

throw any light on this most melancholy business? I have just returned from Dr. Crossthwaite's house, where he was kind enough to see me, and his opinion is that on one side or the other—that is to say, on Vinca's or on yours, there must have been (generations back possibly, for *that* he says makes *no* difference) an admixture of what is called coloured blood. Now, *I* can safely say that *my* relations and those of my late husband, a cousin of Lord Duart's, as you know, come of the purest possible race, and therefore——'

'Therefore,' interrupted Gerald impetuously, for his usually calm nature was stirred to anger by his mother-in-law's more than hinted-at imputation, 'therefore you conclude that the stain, if stain there be, must be inherited from *my* dear parents? Mrs. Brudenell, this matter must now, since you have thought fit to bring it forward, be fully and completely investigated. My grandmother, my father's mother, will, I am sure, see the expediency of this, whilst my mother's people' (and at the mention of *her* name, his previously firm voice quavered slightly) 'will, there is no doubt, do all in their power to account for what seems now so terribly mysterious. I will write to-day to Herondale, where my Aunt Margaret is as usual staying, and she, I am

happy to say,—is wonderfully well up in the family history. Lady Arabella, too, must be at once communicated with; and above all things, every one must be warned to say nothing, for the present at least, to Vinca.'

A weary sigh, as he uttered his wife's name, broke from poor Gerald's lips, for in his heart the woman who was still the idol of his life was ever uppermost, and already had anxiety for her safety thrust out, as one nail does another, every vestige of his short-lived wrath. Now, mother although she was of the fair young creature whose well-being occupied so large a place in Gerald's thoughts, Mrs. Brudenell's view, she being a woman of the world, took a wider range. What she dreaded most in this matter was publicity, and its attendant evils—ridicule and disgrace. Gerald, if he were not held in check, might, as truly she felt, take the whole world into his confidence, and that same world must—the case was, she told herself, imperative—learn as little as possible of the truth. Had she dared—but happily (for there are limits even to the courage of a woman who, born with a deficiency of the milk of human kindness, has fought the battle of life after the manner of this so-called Christian lady) she did not so dare—Mrs. Brudenell would have

expressed to Gerald her regret that the child, of which she was herself the grandmother, had been permitted by those who had (humanly speaking) held the thread of its young life in their hands to cumber the earth, on which 'a thing so monstrous' had no business. But although the habits and laws of the world she worshipped checked the utterance of the words which were on her lips, she nevertheless spoke glibly enough of the absolute necessity of burying from human ken the living and revolting witness of what was evidently a hitherto well-kept family mystery.

'When Lady Arabella has given her opinion, we shall better know how to act, but I feel almost certain that she will see with me the great importance of secrecy. Dr. Crossthwaite is, of course, *safe*, and Mrs. Craik must be bribed to silence. For her own sake, indeed, the woman would hold her tongue, for no one likes to employ a chattering nurse. However, it comes to this, Gerald' (and here she deemed it expedient to adopt a more conciliatory tone), 'that you must bestir yourself in this matter. The child must be put out to nurse: a careful person can easily be found——'

'And Vinca, is she to know nothing?' asked Gerald hastily. 'God knows how gladly I

would in this case, as in every other, spare her the slightest pang; but we must remember that this is her own child, and that we have no right whatever to take it from her.'

'But cannot you see that the longer the child is here the greater will be the chances of discovery? Besides,' continued Mrs. Brudenell impatiently, 'we have the right which a first-rate medical opinion gives us of doing what is safest for your wife. Of course she will have to be deceived at first, but it will be for her own good; and really, Gerald, I thought you loved her too well to stand out against anything which the doctor recommends as right and safe.'

'I do not stand out, as you call it, against Dr. Crossthwaite's advice,' retorted Gerald, who was being again roused into one of his short fits of wrath by his mother-in-law's interference and pertinacity, 'and I quite feel that Vinca's health should be the first consideration; but I must have breathing-time, and above all I must consult those who have—pardon me for saying so—as good a right as you have to advise me. When I have seen my grandmother——'

'Who hates Vinca! Hates us all, in short. Oh! if you are going to consult Lady Arabella, my daughter's chances of being spared this infliction are poor indeed.'

'It is not a question of Vinca being spared, but of this unfortunate child—our eldest son unfortunately—being smuggled out of sight for the simple reason that he is not a pleasant object to look upon. It is very possible that if anything of the kind were to be done, people would talk far more about the poor little chap than if he were left in the nursery as any other not especially nice-looking baby would be. At any rate, I am not for doing anything secret or underhand. When poor dear Vinca is strong enough to do so, let her see the child. God knows that I do not look forward with any pleasure to that event; but, like every other misfortune, it strikes me that this one must be submitted to with what patience we can summon to our aid.'

'And supposing,' rejoined Mrs. Brudenell emphatically, whilst she looked full into his truthful eyes, 'that your wife, after seeing the child, were to take a dislike both to it and *you?* What then? Perhaps' (and her voice sounded very hard and bitter) 'you may repent when it is too late that you did not follow my advice.'

A strong shudder, as he listened to this cruel suggestion, ran through poor Gerald's frame, and it was only by a vigorous effort that he was able to say, with tolerable calmness:

'You must, Mrs. Brudenell, be of course a better judge of your own sex than I can be, and therefore that *you* should think such a result possible is not exactly encouraging. To your question, however, I can only reply that I hope never to regret having acted, to the best of my judgment, rightly. As regards also the possibility of incurring Vinca's hatred, I am not, I confess, alarmed: judging of her feelings by my own (and this I think I have a right to do), the calamity which has befallen us is little likely to alienate her heart from me.'

'And this is your last word?' Mrs. Brudenell, as he rose from his chair, asked.

'My last for the present, excepting to entreat you to take care of Vinca. For myself, I must now lose no time in seeing my grandmother, and writing to Herondale;' and as he said the last word he put forth the right hand of peace and goodfellowship towards his mother-in-law.

At the moment when he, moved thereto by the genuine kindness of his heart, unfurled before her eyes the flag of truce, Mrs. Brudenell chanced to be extremely busy with her bonnet-strings. She had breakfasted solidly since her return from Harley Street, an early drive in a 'hansom' through the brisk March air having given her an appetite. She had, however, eaten in haste,

and was now over the yellow stains which a treacherous poached egg had left upon her ribbons repenting at leisure. It is just possible that she, not having been like Gerald originally endowed with the blessed instincts of a peace-maker, had seen and had as speedily ignored the offering of his hand; be this, however, as it may, certain it is that after this somewhat stormy discussion no finger-grasp, cordial or otherwise, between this uncongenial pair betokened either oblivion of the past or a better understanding for the future.

CHAPTER XIV.

'What though *her* hair be grey?—*she* is not old in mind.'
PLAUTUS.

'WELL! my dear boy, and how is she? Going on well, of course, with Crossthwaite in charge. Crossthwaite has one great merit as a doctor. He *will* be obeyed, and between you and me, Gerald, young ladies, nowadays—but never mind that now—tell me about *her*. *And* the dear baby! I told you it would be a boy, and now you see how right I am!'

Lady Arabella Mainwaring is sitting, with a large heap of fleecy wool-work on her lap, in her pretty drawing-room in Chapel Street, May Fair. The years, few as they have been, which have elapsed since her grandson's marriage and her own voluntary departure from Wroxbourne, have not a little aged her. The sudden change from what had been in some respects a busy and a useful life (a life, moreover, in which power had been a

conspicuous element, and which was so frequently brightened by the presence of the one being whom she loved) to an existence such as a lonely woman in a small London house is doomed to lead, cannot fail to be a great and trying one. Lady Arabella was, as the reader may recall to mind, already well-stricken in years when the change to which I have just alluded was the one which it fell to her lot to bear. To her it had been, owing to peculiar circumstances, a momentous one indeed, and, for a time at least, it had almost seemed that, like a venerable tree suddenly uprooted by the tempest, she would gradually wither away in the strange soil to which she had been so late in life transplanted. From the date of her marriage to Gerald's grandfather she had known no other home than Wroxbourne. As guardian to her son, she had remained in power there, and (as it may be deemed unnecessary here to repeat) she had after that son's marriage, when his absences abroad became both long and frequent, fulfilled for nearly a quarter of a century the onerous duties of regent and 'lady paramount' at the old Abbey.

Naturally enough, Lady Arabella, being a proud as well as a reserved woman, found, in her fallen fortunes, few to pity her; and of the

many who prophesied that this 'coming down' in the world would be the old lady's death, there were probably not a few who, mentally at least, if not aloud, declared that she would in that case be rightly served, in that, as the Abbey's mistress, she had held her head so high above her fellows. Of a surety, it was remarked, that small house in Chapel Street could never contain so much inflated grandeur as hung about the deposed regent of Wroxbourne; but in this respect the prophets of evil found themselves mistaken, for Lady Arabella Mainwaring—who at the age of seventy-five enjoyed the inestimable blessings of good health and of an unshaken nervous system—found that the obnoxious quality which had made her so many enemies, stood her in good stead when *noblesse* obliged her to face with dignity her changed position. What she might have suffered in private from that change, and from the loss of luxuries which only by the *very* rich can be enjoyed, and which, from long habit, had become as necessaries of life to her, was known but to this lady's self alone. Outwardly she betrayed no sign of discontent, and had even refused an offer made to her by Gerald to double the jointure of two thousand pounds a year that was hers by right of settlement.

'What does it signify, dear boy,' she had said

to him, 'whether old Evans drives me out with one horse or two? You will want all your money by-and-by, take my word for it, and will then be glad that I said "No" to your kind offer.'

Gerald, who did not dare to press the question, went his way, feeling not a little sore at heart; for his grandmother, as well he knew, had in her refusal levelled a shot at his adored Vinca, which his heart told him she was far too perfect to deserve.

'She will never appreciate my darling rightly,' he had said to himself; 'for grannie is too cold and stern to understand anyone so sweet and gentle and unselfish as is the woman who is all the world to me.'

A considerable time had now elapsed since Gerald Mainwaring had to his own heart spoken this opinion of his wife. She had been a bride then, and in his imagination she was adorned to the full with every virtue which in a bride it is natural to expect. There were no signs of extravagance at that time in the yielding girl who seemed to have no will or wish save his. Her voice was in truth ever 'sweet, gentle and low;' and if—and if—since those days there had been some signs of change; if there were moments when the tones of that voice had not been quite so dulcet as of yore, and when the *will* of the

wife had been asserted after a fashion which had sometimes surprised the husband, the memory of those signs and symptoms had faded away into nothingness, and the low-spirited invalid, who in her weakness had again given him her sweetest smiles, was once more endowed by Gerald with every virtue under heaven.

It would be in vain to attempt a description of the state of mind into which Lady Arabella was thrown by the terrible intelligence which her grandson had come to communicate. In order to form any adequate idea of her consternation and distress, it must be remembered that she was amongst the very small number of persons who were cognisant of the real facts regarding Gerald's birth, and that consequently the calamity which had occurred horrified far more than it surprised her. It had the effect besides—and this was especially hard upon her grandson, of causing her, for the moment at least, to regard him with feelings that were akin to repulsion. She saw in him less the child of a dearly-loved son than the illegitimate offspring of a woman who sprung from a 'revolting' race; and this being so, she found in the bitterness of her spirit no words with which to soothe or comfort him. Gerald, although he was of course quite in the dark as to the reason of this sudden

coldness, felt it nevertheless to his heart's core. Through the very marrow of his bones (for his was, as we are aware, a sensitive and finely-strung nature) ran the chill which Lady Arabella's unsympathizing questions and remarks, together with the stony look in her eyes, had produced. For several minutes he remained mute, with his large, pathetic eyes fixed on the pattern of the carpet, and with one long delicate hand smoothing the glossy coat of his grandmother's cat, that sociable animal having, uninvited, taken up her quarters on his knee. At last he summoned voice to say, and the *timbre* of the voice was weak, and the manner hesitating:

'Mrs. Brudenell says, grannie, that she thinks —at least, she said that perhaps *you* would think, that the poor little fellow had better be sent to some one in the country to nurse. She mentioned, too, Dr. Crossthwaite having given his opinion that on one side or the other——'

'Oh, I know what you are going to say, and it's all nonsense—the most arrant nonsense! Things of the same kind happen every day, only no one knows anything about them. But as to sending the child away, I think that Mrs. Brudenell is, for once in her life, perfectly right——'

'But, grannie, there is Vinca; and surely you

must feel with me, that she, the poor child's mother, ought to be consulted? She has as yet heard nothing of this misfortune; but I believe —at least I have heard it said, that in cases where an infant is unhappily deformed, or is——'

'An *object*, in short, that the mother loves it more, for the very reason which causes others to turn away from it in disgust? This may be so. I give no opinion on the subject generally; only of one thing I am sure, and that is, that whatever other mothers may do, your wife is not the woman to make herself remarkable by any such display of extraordinary maternal devotion. I have watched her with Claudia, and if *she* had been a good-looking child with a rosy complexion, and that kind of thing, Vinca might possibly have 'played pretty' with her before company, in the character of a tender mamma; but as the poor little thing—though she really is, I must say that, as sweet-tempered and as good as child can be—is not——'

But before the dignified great-grandmother can proceed farther in her personal remarks upon the little girl, who certainly has not hitherto been surfeited by an excess of sweets in the matter of motherly caresses, Gerald, whose rapid transitions of feeling are amongst the most re-

markable characteristics of his idiosyncrasy, starts from his chair, and standing erect before his interlocutor, takes up his young wife's cause with a will.

'You have no right,' he says hotly, 'to speak in this manner of Vinca. You do not know her. You have been always prejudiced against her, and now, perhaps because she has had the great misfortune to bring into the world this child which you are pleased to call an *object*, you turn upon her in this cruel way! And upon me too! Oh, grannie, what have *I* done' (and a change as rapid as the last coming over his spirit, causes the rich, mellow voice to tremble, and his eyes to be hot with the pressure of coming tears). 'Oh, grannie, what have *I* done that you should look at me so coldly and speak so angrily, when in my great trouble I come to you for comfort and for advice?'

Poor young fellow! In that tender, lovable nature of his there is to be found but a small amount of vigorous fibre. Had the backbone of his pliant, quiet-loving idiosyncrasy been of firmer and more reliable texture, he would surely have made a better fight against the actual tempest of tears which, as he leans his elbow on the chimney-piece, breaks, with an accompaniment of almost hysterical sobs, from his eyes.

Thoroughly ashamed of himself does he feel, in that he has failed in his efforts to control his emotion; but when Lady Arabella, softened and subdued by the sight of his agitation, draws his head down to hers, and kissing his wet cheek fondly, whispers the while words of kindness, his soul does not, like that of the Psalmist of old, 'refuse comfort.'

When Lady Arabella, whose heart had in fact grown, with her advancing years, softer instead of harder, has recovered from the fit of temporary ill-humour into which Gerald's information had thrown her, she, being a woman of sense, gives him some valuable counsel in regard to his future conduct in the matter.

'If you are wise,' she says, 'you will lose no time in seeing and consulting with the family at Herondale. On every account they have the right to be first informed of what has taken place; but as to the wisdom of keeping the affair as much as possible a secret from the world in general, *there* I quite agree with Mrs. Brudenell. Money, as we all know, does a great deal in cases of this kind, and in order to prevent the annoyance of having one's private affairs made the talk of the town, money, my dear Gerald, you must be prepared to give.'

'I don't like it, grannie,' he says dreamily;

for his momentary energy is again in abeyance, and he has flung himself restlessly on the sofa by Lady Arabella's side, 'concealment has, to my thinking, always an ugly and a mean look. Besides,' he hesitatingly adds, for something whispers to his inner consciousness that Lady Arabella's opinion will not coincide with the one which he is about to enunciate, 'I do not see, excepting as it regards Vinca, that the thing matters so very much—I mean to others—nor can I understand why they should trouble themselves to talk about the child at all. If I am not ashamed of it—and I see no reason why I should be—whose feelings but Vinca's need in any way be considered? Secresy conveys the idea of guilt; and who knows what wonderful suspicions the spending money in the way you propose might not awaken in people's minds?'

'Who knows, indeed!' rejoins the old lady, with a jerk of the head which sets every bow in her cap vibrating. 'But, my dear,' she, after a few minutes, given to what Gerald cannot but feel is very anxious thought, continues, 'as regards the expediency or otherwise of following Mrs. Brudenell's advice, I can only repeat to you my recommendation to hurry to Herondale. From the Fieldens you will meet with the kindest, as well as the most sensible advice, and

nothing can be more natural, now that your wife is safe, than your paying a short visit to your relations. Go then, my dear boy, without loss of time, and endeavour if you can to keep your sister-in-law Miss Rosie, from chattering nonsense about the baby.'

CHAPTER XV.

'The element of fire
Is pure. It cannot change, nor hide its nature,
But burns as brightly in a gipsy camp
As in a palace hall.'

LONGFELLOW.

THE sun is shining brightly into the large cheerful drawing-room at Herondale, in which the two ladies (the mother and daughter) of the house are seated. Ostensibly they are occupied by their needle and crochet-work, whilst in reality they are watching, from the big bay-window that has view upon a terrace-walk, two figures, those of Mr. Fielden and Gerald, who are walking slowly to and fro, and are evidently engaged in serious converse.

It is a pretty, old-fashioned looking room. The faded chintz of the curtains and furniture-covers dates from the time when articles of British manufacture could hold their own (and that for

the best possible reasons) against the world, whilst the carpet, time-worn also, and in some places almost threadbare, can still, like the twice-turned 'double poplin' of the parson's widowed mother, command respect, in that it 'cost money in its day.' A ray of bright March sunshine falls upon the snow-white braids of Mrs. Fielden's hair, and traces a line of light upon the old carpet, the which 'golden path of rays' has been taken advantage of by 'Donald,' the nearly blind old *collie*, to stretch upon it his chilly limbs, in temporary physical enjoyment. With the exception of that ray of sunlight, and of the mass of crimson wool which lies (in process of transformation into a *couvre-pied*) in Aunt Madge's lap, there is no colour in the room—all is cold, and old, and grey.

Two hours have elapsed since Gerald made his appearance at Herondale, and he has told his tale to those who have, all his life long, stood to him in the light of nearest and dearest relatives. The morning's post had not only brought warning of his coming, but also a letter from Lady Arabella, and another from Mrs. Brudenell, announcing the event which had taken place, and containing in detail their own views on the matter. For many reasons the news had greatly disturbed the quiet which

reigned as a rule in beautiful Herondale. The deception in regard to Gerald Mainwaring's parentage, which had long ago been practised by his father, and weakly connived at by the woman to whom his will was law, had always been a subject of regret to the Fielden family. As an act of wrong-doing, Margaret, the just and high-minded daughter, who took her stand on 'principle,' and who felt that the boy she loved was in fact an embodied lie, this regret had ever been most deeply felt. In common also with her father, she had always feared that the truth might at some future time be known, and that the memory of the dear ones who were resting in their quiet graves might one day, together with the good name of the child of their adoption and their love, be held up to public ignominy and contempt.

So many years had elapsed since the many precautions to legalize Gerald's birth and to stifle the murmurs of ever-ready suspicion had been taken, that the sense of security which long immunity from retribution gives had gradually stolen over the quiet loving spirits at Herondale. Now, however, this deceitful calm had been rudely destroyed, and Mr. Fielden, whose knowledge of the world and of human nature in the aggregate was considerable, had been the

first to see that what might appear to some 'a little fire,' might 'kindle' in the end 'a great matter.' Tongues, as he well remembered, had not—in the long ago past—been altogether idle when it was a question of the next heir to a property of twenty thousand a year. Those whispers had been smothered then, but only, it was to be feared, to break out afresh when any noxious vapour of suspicion should stir the smouldering embers into flame. Eustace Fielden, one of the most honourable and least money-loving of men, groaned in spirit as he reflected that he too (when the multitude of little members were set a-wagging) would probably not escape slander. It might be said—and how could he disprove the insidious libel?—that he, in his eagerness to 'catch' a wealthy husband for his daughter, had connived at and even perhaps abetted the unworthy subterfuge by which society (that great but mystical arbiter of many an honest man and eke good woman's fate) had been deceived and tricked.

And having been so tricked, what more natural than that society should, when exposure came, take its legitimate revenge? Unhappily for the lovers of 'sensation,' and for the gloaters over criminal details, there had been no act of fraud, no wronging of a rightful heir, no pro-

ceeding calculated to excite in the minds of the wonder seekers any hope that a public trial might bring to light deeds hitherto unwhipped of justice, but which called aloud for reprobation. But although the sin, if sin it were, was in reality a venial one, yet that evil thing called gossip, which, like a snowball, gathers as it rolls, would doubtless, out of the 'mountain' of mystery with which it had to deal, be able to produce a 'mouse' of no small dimensions.

Mr. Fielden, amongst the various causes which he had at different times imagined might lead to exposure of the family secret, had never contemplated the possibility of such an event as had now occurred. He had doubtless heard, without, however, paying much attention to the subject, of a certain curious physiological fact connected with the negro race, that fact being that the descendants of a quadroon mother were liable, even to the third and fourth generation, to the misfortune of being born into the world with all the characteristics of the negro race. Instances of such a calamity were, he had heard, rare, but they were perfectly well authenticated, and Mr. Fielden, while recalling to his mind certain conversations in which he had borne a part, could not for a moment doubt that, fair as a lily though the complexion of Claudine Montez

had been, it was to the 'black drop' in her veins that Vinca's newly born infant owed its nigrescent colouring.

'It is a horrible business altogether,' had remarked Mr. Fielden, who, with his hands under his coat-tails, was treading, before Gerald's arrival, with measured steps, the faded carpet on which 'Donald' had not as yet (for the day was still young) found a wandering sunstreak along which to stretch himself; 'and what to do for the best it is impossible to say.'

'I declare I quite dread the sight of the poor fellow,' remarked Mrs. Fielden, whose nerves were not now in so satisfactory a condition as they had been in the days when at New Orleans she had done successful battle in the cause of prudence and common-sense. 'I wonder how he will take it—and I must say I am rather surprised that Lady Arabella should have advised him to come here and consult *us*. His ignorance of the true facts of the case makes all *real* and useful talking over it so utterly impossible!'

'And yet,' interposed Aunt Madge gently, 'what can be more natural than his coming in his trouble to those whom he has always looked upon, not only as his near relations, but as his loving friends? Lady Arabella would be but a poor comforter in the hour of trial; besides,' she

added, with some slight hesitation both of voice and manner, for she was aware that her views in this matter were not shared by her parents, 'Gerald's grandmother is, you see, a strong advocate for concealment, whilst I——'

'Oh, we know, my dear Madge, that your tongue has always itched to reveal to him the truth regarding his parentage! You forget, it seems to me, not only the solemn promise of secresy which we gave to D'Arcy, but that by doing as you wish, you would cause the poor boy to despise, if not to hate, the memory of his real parents, whilst even that of our sweet Lilian, than whom no mother could have more fondly loved him, would not altogether escape from ignominy.'

During this short colloquy Mr. Fielden had come to a standstill by the window, and was looking out anxiously for the arrival of his guest. From between groups of thickly growing evergreen shrubs occasional glimpses of the road that led from the village-station through the grounds could be obtained, and by means of one of those openings the watcher was enabled to catch sight of the expected 'fly.'

'There he is!' exclaimed the much discomposed master of the house, who, after the manner of his sex, failed to evince due consideration for the nerves of his womankind; and

forthwith he hurried away to greet the unfortunate young man who had been from infancy reared in the belief that in Eustace Fielden of Herondale he was so happy as to possess a grandfather!

After this brusque announcement that a meeting which would not fail to be an agitating one was so near at hand, the ladies subsided into silence. Speculation seems out of place when a terrible certainty *may* be imminent. There existed the possibility (for not one of the anxious Herondale trio had forgotten Mr. Scobell, and the curious and suggestive queries which he had at Wroxbourne put both to Mr. Fielden and his wife) that Gerald might, either through the agency of the American, or by some other means, have obtained a knowledge of the bitter truth. The absence from London of Rosie's admirer was a circumstance of which the Fieldens were in ignorance. Had they been aware of the fact that a few hours after Mrs. Mainwaring's *accouchement* this, to their thinking, somewhat mysterious Southern gentleman had betaken himself to the Continent, the two women would probably have awaited with less trepidation the result of the present meeting.

They were not kept long in suspense. Almost before they had thought it possible that any con-

versation between Mr. Fielden and his *soi-disant* grandson could have taken place, the two returned to the room together, and one glance at the countenance of the latter was sufficient to demonstrate to his well-wishers the fact that as yet he was not cognisant of the dark cloud which hung over his birth. Very sweet and winning was the smile with which he greeted the dear 'grandmother' and the still dearer 'Aunt Madge,' whose joy at seeing him 'so like himself' made them for the moment almost oblivious of the distressing cause which brought him there that day.

And then, as I before said, the young man told his tale; and there was that both in his words and manner which convinced his hearers that it was for Vinca's sake, and almost for hers only, that his heart was heavy within him. The feeling was of course (but that fact was unsuspected by himself) a compound one. Even in a breast so kindly as was his, the alloy of human selfishness crept in; and he could not but regret his young wife's trouble the more for the reason that when she happened to be angered or discontented, the 'cup' (so-called) of his happiness was decidedly deficient both in quantity and quality.

As his friends at Herondale had expected

would be the case, little good was likely, in the way of consultation, to result from the young man's presence. To spare what it pleased him to call his wife's 'feelings' was apparently (as regarded the *petit nouveau né*) his sole aim and object; while as for himself, the pleasure which he felt, and the relief from care which, at peaceful Herondale, he experienced, were so evident and great, that 'Aunt Madge,' as she, together with Mrs. Fielden, watched the pair—the young man and the old—while they paced the terrace-walk together, decided that if it depended upon her, many a long day should elapse before the return of her boy to London, and to Vinca.

CHAPTER XVI.

'Hast any philosophy in thee, shepherd?'
As You Like It.

'TELL us something about your American friend, Gerald—the man we met at Wroxbourne. He was a fellow I never *could* make out—the first who ever baffled me,' continued Mr. Fielden, who, if he had not fallen during two-thirds of his life so easy a prey to the clever and the designing, would not have been under the sad necessity of raising money on a property which before his time had never had a pound's-weight of debt upon its acres. 'He was not in town, I think you said, when you came away?'

'No; he went the morning after Vinca's confinement to Paris. His mission there was to escort to London this beautiful Princess Wolkersdorf, who is expected to make quite a *furore* in

'Ah! I remember,' said Mrs. Fielden, as she helped herself (for dinner was just over at Herondale) to some of the tasteless forced strawberries which are, by country gentlemen's gardeners, cultivated so much more for show than use. 'We often heard about that wonderful Princess, at Wroxbourne. Lord Something Clayton absolutely raved, either about the mother or the daughter, I forget which it was.'

'The girl most probably,' said Gerald, 'for he has a weakness for youth and innocence. He is one of the best fellows going, only he forgets that women's hearts are fragile things. We shall see, when these foreigners come to London, which of them it is that for the moment this *volage* Arthur Clayton worships.'

Gerald has now been two whole days at Herondale, and as he has already received three telegrams from Belgrave Square informing him that all is well at home, he finds no difficulty in *pro tem.* banishing from his mind every subject of annoyance. With almost boyish pleasure he roams, either alone or with Aunt Madge, whose pedestrian powers are as useful as ever, over the scenes of his long-ago enjoyments—amongst which enjoyments not the least in degree is visiting the cottages of the 'humbler' classes, with many of whom he had been, ever since the

happy days of his happy childhood, a prime and a well-remembered favourite.

'How nice it is to be with you again, Aunt Madge,' he on the second afternoon of his stay remarks to the dear companion of his boyhood, who, 'kilted' and red-cloaked as is her wont, is trudging through the copse-wood by his side. 'It almost seems,' he continues, with a sigh which he contrives to stifle in its birth, 'as though these later years were dream-times, and that I am still the troublesome but most happy hobbledehoy who used to escape so often from gloomy Wroxbourne to be petted and made much of here by you.'

Margaret Fielden, who, both from age and temperament, has found it far less easy than has been the case with Gerald to shake off the painful impressions which the events of the last few days have occasioned, does not immediately respond to this appeal. Her conscience, too, which is a rarely-sensitive one, pricks her painfully as she remembers the part (not a very active one perhaps, but nevertheless a 'part') which she took in Gerald's marriage. She had hoped—short-sighted mortal as she now suspects herself to have been—that by an early union with one beautiful and beloved, he would escape the snares and pitfalls to which on his entrance

into life a young man situated as was her *nephew*, and endowed with his peculiarly sensitive and ardent temperament, is especially exposed. Her object had been to promote, not only his happiness, but his moral welfare; and now—now, when in the spring-time of his manhood, when she had fondly trusted that in a congenial home he was enjoying halcyon days, keeping 'high holiday,' so to speak, whilst

'A guardian angel o'er his life presided,'

the child of her heart's adoption was—although perhaps he had as yet hardly realized the fact—a sufferer from causes with which the birth of his once wished-for son had but little, if anything, to do. It had been impossible to hide from eyes so keen as Margaret's—eyes, too, of which affection had quickened the perspicacity—that absence from his home was felt by Gerald as a relief, and, this being so, something akin to remorse, in that she had been instrumental in prematurely introducing him to the cares of life, holds her for a moment silent. Then she says, with an assumption of the cheerfulness which she is far from feeling:

'Yes, those were happy times, dear boy. Too bright, I fear, as is the case with many a gay spring morning, to continue cloudless. But,

Gerald dear, I should be grieved to think that above *your* sky even the slightest cloudlet should be gathering. I am not thinking now about your boy,' she, in some trepidation, is *par parenthèse*, continuing, when her companion interrupts her by saying, sadly :

'I know it, Aunt Madge, and I know, too, that no one will ever wish to speak about him! Poor little chap ! I never willingly recall him to my mind, but when I do'—and a kind of shudder, for Gerald is one of the most fastidious of mortals, runs through his frame—'I feel no love, but only—don't think me very wicked, Aunt Madge—a something akin to disgust.'

Poor fellow ! Could he have guessed the thoughts which were with torturing swiftness surging through his friend's brain, his heart would have been, both for himself and her, sore indeed ! For Madge's lively imagination had rushed away to a cruelly possible future, when the mystery of his birth might be made known to him, and when he would mourn in dust and ashes over the degradation which the sin of others had brought upon his head. In the twinkling of an eye the warm-hearted woman was picturing to herself his sufferings, and calling to mind the likelihood which existed that when the dreaded crisis should arrive, *she* would not be there to

sympathize and to soothe. Then a great longing seized her to take the matter into her own hands, and end at once and for ever the unworthy deception which, she instinctively felt, had been, and would be whilst it lasted, the curse of the young life beside her. Who but she, the warm-hearted woman asks herself, who from his helpless infancy had loved him with a mother's love, could soften to him the blow which, like the sword of Damocles, was hanging, suspended by a single hair, above his head? Who but she, when the waves of passion threatened to overwhelm him, or when, in the low tide of depression's turbid waters, he seemed ready to sink, could speak comfort to the wounded spirit, and bid the child of misfortune to take heart again?

It was a strong impulse, but fortunately, perhaps, a momentary one. Almost before Gerald had had time to marvel at her silence, the re-action came, and Aunt Madge, remembering the long-kept promise, was again her cheerful, unimpulsive self.

'My dear,' she said, in answer to Gerald's last remark, 'I cannot allow you to grow morbid about your boy. If God has seen fit to try you in this way, it is—are you not sure of it, dear?—your duty to submit. And,

besides, there are worse misfortunes which may befall a child than a dark skin and features which are the reverse of beautiful. If this little one be bright and clever, if he—— Well, dear,' after a pause, during which she clasped her hands, covered with her thick gardening-gloves, over his arm, 'there are parents far more heavily visited than you (in so far, at least, as we at present know) can be said to be; and Gerald dear, if the worst, as the saying is, comes to the worst—if this poor infant should, as time wears on, become an unacceptable inmate in your house, why, you must let it come to me. As a child of my own it should be reared and educated, and,' with one of her brightest and most winning smiles, 'I think I need not promise that *your* son would never, under my care, pine away for lack of love.'

'How good you are, Aunt Madge!' Gerald is beginning, but his farther speech is checked by the sound of footsteps advancing rapidly along the gravelled path behind them. The heads of both pedestrians are immediately turned in the direction whence the sound proceeds, and at once find themselves confronted with no less a person than the under-butler.

He holds in his hand a letter, for the possession of which he accounts by saying that the

carriage had just returned from the afternoon drive, and had brought the late post.

'There being a letter marked "immediate," 'm, for Mr. Gerald,' hastily continued the man, 'Mr. Kekewich, he desired me, as the carriage dropped Mrs. Fielden at the Vicarage, to bring it on here——'

'There, that will do, Thomas,' Miss Fielden says curtly, for she reads curiosity in the man's face, and is desirous that Gerald should, in the present critical state of his affairs, escape as much as possible from the speculations of the inquisitive.

'It is from Rosie,' he says, as he breaks the seal with which his sister-in-law has taken the precaution to ensure her missive from being tampered with; 'I wonder what the elf has got to say for herself.'

He has endeavoured to speak unconcernedly, but his heart beats quicker than its wont, as his eyes rest upon the opening words of a page, on the top of which is inscribed in conspicuous letters the word '*Private.*'

CHAPTER XVII.

'My spirit flew in feathers then,
That is so heavy now,
And summer pools could hardly cool
The fever on my brow!'

HOOD.

'MY DEAR OLD JERRY,—

(So commenced the letter, which its recipient read in solitude, Aunt Madge having discreetly disappeared behind a clump of evergreens which skirted one of the Herondale lodges.)

'Knowing what a goose, in some things, you are, I thought it best to refrain from giving you a "white night," and therefore it is that you only now learn the important fact that Zelica—that is to say Vinca—has seen the baby! I called her Zelica by mistake, having been possessed by a horrible fear that when the important moment—you will guess what I mean—should arrive, she would do—well, what that hysterical

young woman in "Lalla Rookh" appears to have done. But no such thing! Our Vinca is made, I suppose, of sterner stuff; for though she "looked"—she could hardly do otherwise, as she had herself proposed the interview—she neither "shrieked" nor "sank upon the ground." What she might have done had she begun, as Mrs. Craik says, to "feel her feet," it is impossible to guess; but as she was lying *prone*, as the novelists say, upon the bed, propped up with pillows bedizened with lace and blue ribbons, there was nothing to be done but to remain prostrate "in her loveliness." And now, dear, it is as well to inform you (for I would not for the world have you think my dear sister unfeeling) that the most extraordinary precautions were taken to prevent "surprise." It was at first tenderly whispered by my respected parent that the child *might*, without over-stepping the limits of expediency, have been fairer, and then Mabel, who had heard of someone with a heart complaint having been born *blue*, suggested, on Dr. Crossthwaite's authority, poor man! that this was a case in point. And so they went on, till Vinca, who had not before, I really believe, cared very much whether she saw the poor little thing or not, waxed so curious on the subject, that Mrs. Craik, whom I never till then heard

snort so loudly, had to bring it to the bedside. "Why, good gracious, nurse!" Vinca said, "do all babies, whose blood doesn't circulate, look like this?" "In course they do, 'm," Mrs. Craik with exemplary calm replied. "If their little hearts arn't able to send the blood down to their little toes, the thing must 'appen. It's God A'mighty's doing of, 'm!" she added solemnly, as she lightly laid a dainty square of flannel over her baby's face; "and it isn't for us poor mortials to question the ways of Providence." After she had left the room, creaking majestically as she went, Vinca made a very sensible remark. So sensible indeed was it, that I consider it would be out of its proper place were I to inscribe it on this flippant sheet of paper, and I shall therefore keep the repetition of it till we meet. And now, dear old boy, you are not to fret and worry yourself about anything. Vinca said no word, good, bad, or indifferent, at the "unveiling," about you; but then you must remember that just now her "sitting up" dresses are necessarily taking up a great deal of her thoughts. Mr. Scobell has come back to London, and with him the high and *puissantes* Princesses. I shall keep my word, and not breathe a syllable to Mr. Scobell about the baby. He—not poor little "*D'Arcy*," for that I conclude will still be the

poor little one's name—is looking more gaunt and strange then ever.

'Always, dear old man,

'Your affectionate sister,

'ROSIE BRUDENELL.'

By the time that Gerald had finished reading his letter, Miss Fielden, whose visit to the Lodge had been merely an excuse for her temporary absence from his side, made her appearance on the scene. Without a word spoken, he placed the letter in her hand, and, leaning back upon the stout ash stick, the metal-bound end of which had dug itself into the moist gravel of the walk, he with eager eyes watched her speaking countenance as she read. As regarded his own feelings, he had not as yet had time to make up his mind; of one fact, however, he was certain, the much-dreaded shock to his dear Vinca's nerves had been given, and, her courage having mounted with the occasion, no evil had resulted from the blow.

'Well,' says he, a little impatiently, when Aunt Madge, having read Miss Rosie's characteristic epistle twice over, does not, as he had hoped, give voice, without a moment's delay or hesitation, to her opinion concerning its contents, 'what do you think? It is a good thing over, is it not?'

'Very,' replied Margaret, who, in the confusion of her ideas consequent on the perusal of the young lady's singular effusion, feels glad that, in one respect at least, she is able thoroughly to agree with her questioner. 'And, according to your sister-in-law's account——'

'Ah!' interrupts Gerald, whose alarm lest his wife should be thought deficient in womanly tenderness renders him, for the moment, unjust to his favourite Rosie; 'you must not think too much of what a flighty girl like this very peculiar one may say. Rosie is the truest, best little creature in the world——'

'So I should imagine, not only from what I have already seen of her, but from this letter——'

'But, Aunt Madge,' Gerald eagerly interposed, 'I want you also to remember that she never gives herself time to think, and that her terribly quick sense of the ludicrous often causes her to make mistakes.'

'Ah, well,' Aunt Madge, in her bright, cheerful way, responds, 'I am in this case so satisfied with Miss Rosie's view of the matter, that I beg you will not try to disturb my convictions. Your wife, dear Gerald, has evidently, as her wise little sister remarks, taken a very rational view of a matter which might possibly, had she

been more impulsive and less amenable to reason, have been the cause of some worry and irritation. All likelihood of that is now, let us hope, happily over. Your stay with us will, I trust, be longer than we had at first ventured to hope it would be; for why, dear, if you are contented here, should you hurry away? Your wife has her relations' ('to say nothing,' she longs to add, 'of her sitting-up dresses') 'to cheer her spirits; and we are so glad to have you with us!' and, pressing the strong young arm on which—for they are walking slowly onwards now—her hand is resting, she looks up with eyes full of affectionate interest into his thoughtful face.

Their steps have led them to the banks of a narrow, but rapid and brawling river, which runs through the Herondale grounds, and forms one of the chief beauties for which the place is noted. In Gerald's mind that river is associated with some of the most stirring memories of his tranquilly happy boyhood. He was, as regarded companions of his own age, a lonely child, a circumstance which may partly account for some of the peculiarities which, in later life, marked his character; and whether he sailed his toy ships on the little river, or, when the age for manlier pleasures came, he deftly threw his artificial fly over the banks, to 'lure the speckled trout' from

their safe harbour amongst the miniature rocks beneath, the lad was as ignorant of the joy of healthy rivalship as of the ecstatic enjoyment which boys of all degrees appear to take in the simple act of shouting with the full strength of their young lungs to their co-mates at play. As he and the dear Aunt Madge (who, in those well-remembered days, had done battle with his natural indolence, and roused him from his well-loved books to exercise and 'play') stood leaning over the parapet of the rustic bridge, the thoughts of Claudine's son flew back to his days of 'childish ignorance'—that ignorance alike of evil and of coming ills which, to us short-sighted mortals, is bliss indeed! His heart feels strangely heavy within his breast; poor Rosie's letter has left an impression upon his mind which is as incomprehensible as it is painful. He cannot reason, poor fellow, for reason is not his forte, on the nature of the cloud which has gathered over his spirit; he can only *feel*, and—as his dark eyes rest dreamily on the dancing wavelets, and on a brilliant kingfisher that is skimming ever and anon over them with glancing wing—remember with an aching breast the bright days of the past!

'My poor fellow, what are you thinking of?' Miss Fielden, who has been anxiously watching

the changes of his expressive face, breaks at length the irksome silence by cheerfully saying. 'You look as if you were coveting that pretty kingfisher for your lady's hat, or else—— Well, may I guess on? Is it possible that, with all the blessings which have been given you to enjoy, you can be wishing that you were once more a boy? Why, dear Gerald,' she continues gently, as, with her elbow on the wooden railing of the bridge, she, too, looks down upon the eddying, sunlit waters and upon the tufts of feathery polipodiums which are clinging parasitically to the roughly put together timbers of the parapet, 'you surely are too wise to have imagined that you could escape the common lot of humanity, namely, sorrow, disappointment, and trial? Does not everyday experience prove the truth of the dictum that "man is born to sorrow as the sparks fly upwards"? And should it not be our end and aim to prepare ourselves as best we may to meet the blows of Fate which, when they do fall, generally take us by surprise?'

But for the ripple of the frothing river, there would be silence, deep as it is solemn, round them. In Margaret's strong white hand—a large one it is, but withal very shapely—there is a bunch of sweet spring violets. She had gathered them in the lodge-keeper's garden, and now the

›tle perfume from their delicate breath rises to rald's brain, and adds its quota to the enerva- g influences which are at work within him.

'Dear Aunt Madge,' he says, and his voice is v and tremulous, 'my second, or should I not ;her say my *other*, as well as my most revered d cherished mother, when did you ever give : counsel that was not wise and right? But regards the blows you speak of, how, I ask, d by what efforts on our part, can we be pre- red for them? When it "*pleased* God" (as cellent Christians say, but I confess I hate the rb thus strangely misapplied) to deprive me at e blow of both my parents—when she, so ıtle and so tender, left me (but for you, Aunt ıdge) in this bleak world alone—I was taken, you have just said, utterly by surprise; and act of mine, no course of conduct on my part, ıld, as it seems to me, have caused me to bear ›re bravely than I did that awful shock and ›st overpowering misery.'

Miss Fielden, after a dissentient movement of r head, is about to speak, when Gerald inter- pts her.

'One moment, dear,' he says. 'You know u have always been patient with me, and I ink I can guess,' laying his hand with a caress- ; movement on her arm, 'from old memories

of the past, what you would say to me. You would have me enlarge my interests, lead a more active life, cease, in short, to be a dreamer, and go in, like more practical men, for the great as well as the little things which make up the sum of human existence. But, dear auntie, there are, as you must admit, varieties in temperaments; and, moreover, you cannot, having borne with my peculiarities so long, be ignorant of the fact that they stand frightfully in the way of my following, at least with any real success, your excellent advice. How can a man, or rather a poor wretch, for such he truly is, who is perpetually haunted by a vague but oppressive sense of coming evil, be the active, energetic character which you have always in your kind and partial fancy seen in me the germs of? Dear Aunt Madge, the curse of my later life (and truly do I believe it *is* cursed), has been this strange foreboding, this well-nigh ever-present sense of some impending ill. I have always, partly because of its indistinctness, for truly the cloud has been "without form and void," refrained from talking of a phase of suffering which many would probable "pooh, pooh" as simple nervousness; but because I have buried my nightmare out of sight, and although the very existence of a skeleton in the hidden

closet of my brain is hitherto, I hope, unknown to all, save to you, it is all too surely *there;* and lately, that is to say within the last few months, the cloud has been darker and the oppression heavier and more impossible to shake off than ever.'

Miss Fielden, who had listened with a surprise which bordered on bewilderment to this avowal, feels still more distressed and pained when Gerald —his confession being ended—lowers his tall head to the parapet of the bridge and hides his face upon his folded arms.

'My dear boy,' she was beginning, but again he stopped her.

'One moment, auntie,' he said, lifting to her sympathizing gaze a very troubled countenance, and eyes in which tears that his manhood forbade him to shed were swimming. 'Only a moment, for I have no right to trouble you with my miserable forebodings, and,' he adds, with rather a ghastly attempt at playfulness, 'it would be only what I deserve if you were for the first time in your life to scold me for what you cannot fail to call my superstitious folly; but, dear, I do want you to believe that I have done my best to exorcise this demon and hinder it from taking its accustomed place as the companion of my daily life; but,' with a shudder which Margaret sees

almost with alarm, so suggestive is it of deep-seated anguish, 'I *cannot* shake it off! I seem to have a knowledge, certain and indisputable, that some great and horrible change in my life and destiny is awaiting me, and also I feel well-assured that the blow is near at hand. There is no reasoning against such fancies, if fancies, indeed, they are; but oh, Aunt Madge, if you could but guess the weariness of it all! There are moments—and since reading Rosie's letter they crowd upon me thickly—when the burden of life seems too heavy for me to bear, and when I can say with Tennyson in the sad little poem which you and I once read together,

> '"I am sick of Time,
> And I desire to rest."'

She cannot answer him. The tears are streaming from her eyes, and the longing that is within her breast to tell him *all* is stronger and more difficult to repress than ever. Yet she dares not yield to it, for the secret is not hers, and besides, by divulging it, she may work mischief where she would fain do good. As she turns with her companion to leave the bridge, memories come thronging round her of conversations listened to long ago, in which proofs were adduced of the vivid imaginations of the negro race, and of the

strength and often melancholy nature of their superstitions.

'God help him, poor boy!' she said to herself, as they walked slowly homewards, and he perceiving, even through the lowered veil of the old garden-hat she wore, that the kindly woman could not speak for tears, kept silence also, as they trod the well-remembered path together.

CHAPTER XVIII.

'Not without Art, but yet to Nature true.'
CHURCHILL.

THERE is hardly a prettier room in all London than the one in Grosvenor Square in which is seated, one bright morning in early April, the far-famed beauty, Princess Wolkersdorf, and our old acquaintance Mr. Westhrop Scobell. The former is beautifully as well as magnificently dressed, and the rich sapphire-hued velvet and costly sable trimmings of her gown become her regal style of beauty well. Her southern birth and the habits of her earlier life render the Princess sensitive to cold, and she finds the English spring, though sunny and warm of aspect, somewhat chilly and ungenial. She is lounging on a couch that is covered with dark-green brocaded satin, and Mr. Scobell, who is seated opposite to her in one of the many ungainly attitudes which Americans, in order to

make themselves thoroughly comfortable, are in the habit of adopting, is thinking for the hundredth time that the world cannot contain another woman half so fair as she. He is not, nor has he ever been, in the slightest degree heart-stricken by the charms which his love of 'art' and his general worship of the 'beautiful' render him so well able to appreciate; for although he has himself outlived the age of romance, this intelligent American requires, in the woman to whom his love may be given, *youth*, together with a fresh and untried heart.

The Princess Wolkersdorf is—as the reader, if he will take the trouble, may calculate for himself—now within a year of forty. It is true that even an envious woman, given the lady's age to guess at, would hardly have surmised it to be more than thirty; but the friend and compatriot who is ever more than ready to admit that she is beautiful exceedingly, is not only aware that it is a *femme de quarante ans* whose soft languid eyes have done wild work in many a lovelorn breast, but that she herself had flung, years upon years before, the treasures of her young heart's love away.

Ten summers have rolled by since Princess Wolkersdorf first became acquainted with Westhrop Scobell. She had then been some years a

wife, and chance having thrown her much into the society of one whom she instinctively felt to be worthy of trust, and whose cosmopolitan habits were likely, as she believed, to qualify him for the office of a helpful friend, she—not hurriedly, but by very slow and cautious degrees—admitted him to her entire confidence. That, in order to trace if possible the fate of her long-lost son, she must lay bare the secrets of her life to some male friend whose activity in the cause would be greater than her husband's had hitherto been, she was well aware; and the more she saw of the man whose nationality (although at the beginning of their acquaintance it to a certain degree prejudiced her against him) facilitated in the end their intimacy, the more firmly did she become convinced that he was the coadjutor whom she needed. It was from Mr. Scobell's lips that the Princess first became acquainted with the leading circumstances (after her own supposed death) of D'Arcy Mainwaring's life, and had also been informed that both he and the wife whom he had chosen had, within a few days of each other, died in Italy, leaving behind them an only son, whose name was Gerald.

The conversation between Madame Wolkersdorf and her American friend which I am about to narrate, will make it evident to the reader that

the former has not been kept in ignorance of the fact that the wife who had consoled D'Arcy Mainwaring for the loss of his first love was none other than the daughter of the lady who, under the orange-trees that surrounded her father's house, had, in gentle and soul-stirring words, spoken to her unheeding ears the words of wisdom.

'And you liked this Mrs. Fielden, did you, when you met her at the great palace in the country where D'Arcy—for of course I understand it all now—never could have taken *me?* She must be an old woman now,' continued Claudine, who for some occult reason, which only the natural perversity of the human mind can account for, seemed little inclined to see merit in the woman whose daughter had become D'Arcy's wife. 'Years ago even, and—ah! how many summers have rolled by since then! —she seemed to me quite what you call elderly. But she was civil, and meant kindly, I suppose, although to my thinking she was proud and cold.'

'I imagine,' the American, in his dry way, rejoined, 'that you must—begging your pardon for my rudeness—have altogether mistaken Mrs. Fielden. In the first place, as she is now only sixty-four, she could not have been more than

forty at the time of which you speak; and forty is—well, the age when woman is at her very prime of fully ripened beauty, and when experience has taught her how to turn her loveliness to the best account. Then, as to your idea of her character and disposition, formed, if I remember rightly, in one single interview, they are as far removed from reality as are your notions, Princess, about her age. Mrs. Fielden is, I should say—but then, as you are aware, my knowledge of her real nature must be to a certain degree superficial—a thoroughly kind and sympathetic person; while, as to pride, in that respect you have indeed mistaken her, for a more unassuming woman, and one less addicted to the vulgarity of treating her fellow-creatures as if they were her inferiors in the scale of creation, never, I should say, existed.'

'There is no danger, I hope, of my meeting Mrs. Fielden in society,' the Princess, who was not inclined to dwell longer on that lady's merits, inquired. 'It is possible of course that she might recognise *me*, and that would on every account be a terrible calamity. I am not thinking of myself,' she continued hastily, for she fancied that a curl on her companion's lip was significant of a passing suspicion from which she felt called upon to justify herself. 'Were it not

for Dacia, and for the necessity of preserving, on her account, my name from reproach, I should cast concealment to the winds and come boldly forward in search of my lost boy; but I must consider *her*, poor child, and be careful to do nothing which may bring a breath of reproach upon my husband's daughter. You have heard no tidings, I suppose, from your other friends—those Brudenells, I mean, and the young man who fills the place which ought to be my son s, about Mrs. Fielden's plans? If I thought there was any chance of her coming to London, I would shut myself up entirely during her stay.'

Before Mr. Scobell can reply, which he is about to do by disclaiming all knowledge of Mrs. Fielden's probable movements, the door opens quickly and the fair young girl, for whose well-being the Princess has just been testifying so much anxious solicitude, enters the room. Both in features and complexion she greatly resembles her mother, but the general effect on the beholder of lineaments which are equally beautiful is strangely different. Instead of the restless, almost eager expression which now marks the countenance of D'Arcy Mainwaring's quondam sweetheart, there is in the soft almond-shaped eyes of her daughter a look so suggestive of repose and quietude as almost to convey the

impression of insensibility. Her mouth, too—that feature which, more than all the rest, is often to an observant looker on an index to the thoughts within—is far less mobile, and considerably more indicative of firmness, than are the fuller and deeper-hued lips of the older woman. Finally, although in stature she exceeds but by an inch the stately height of Princess Wolkersdorf, the girl, owing to the slimness of her figure and the smallness of her beautifully-shaped head, appears considerably the taller of the two.

'And how goes it with our grave young Princess?' asks Mr. Scobell, as he rises from his chair to greet the girl, whose manner, in its quiet self-possession, would well befit a maiden five years at least her senior. 'Has she recovered from the effects of the 'odious voyage,' and the 'tiring journey,' and the unpleasant *buffet* coffee? In short, how do you like London in this sweet spring-time, and by daylight, mademoiselle? Do you think that you can pass three months here without longing to go back to charming Paris, or to still more delightful Rome?'

'It is too soon, I think, to answer your questions,' Dacia, who had seated herself near her mother's sofa, is beginning; but she is interrupted by the American, who, with a twist round of his long person, says, with a grave smile:

'And therefore too soon for me to have asked them—eh? Well, I accept the rebuke. It *is* too soon. You have seen nothing but rows and squares of ugly houses yet, and—most cogent reason of all for not being able to give an opinion—you have not yet had time to make a single acquaintance! Wait till I bring Rosie—Miss Brudenell, I mean—to see you. She is a perfect ray of sunshine, and will make you in love with London at once.'

'Would she? Well, I will try to like her; but I am not fond of being dazzled; and, besides, I know nothing of girls, or what to say to them, or—anything.'

The American laughs, almost silently, after his own peculiar fashion, as he replies:

'Oh, *you* may be mute in her company, fair Princess, for Rosie is always ready to talk or two. And I have promised, if *madame votre mère* consents, to bring Mrs. Brudenell and the young lady here to-morrow afternoon that she may make acquaintance with you both.'

'Oh! certainly I can have no objection to see your friends,' Claudine, with a slight assumption of *hauteur*, says. 'But I thought,' she adds, 'that you mentioned this Miss Rosie as the *youngest* daughter. Is it usual in London to

leave the elder girls of a family at home when the younger go out visiting?'

'*C'est selon*,' Mr. Scobell, with a shrug of his broad shoulders, replies. 'In this case the elder Miss Brudenell, being a kind of Protestant nun, has renounced society altogether; whilst the second, who is plain, and goes in for intellect——'

'Oh, that is enough,' the Princess in her pretty broken English says. 'We will be satisfied, will we not, Dacia, with Miss Rosie for the present? And now we must get ready for the drive and the shopping. You are going with us, Mr. Scobell, so I will make no excuses for leaving you alone whilst we prepare our toilets. Come, my Dacia, and make yourself look pretty for the London world.' And so saying, Princess Wolkersdorf, than whom no woman living cared less for appearances, walks, followed by her daughter, with her usual indolent grace from the room.

There are times—especially in cases when Dacia happens to be present (Dacia, whose ignorance of her mother's long-ago 'past' is so complete, and her respect for and love of that mother are so great and apparently unshakable) —when the easy familiarity of Mr. Scobell's manner towards herself rouses the woman who

has so long played successfully the *rôle* of *grande dame* to momentary indignation. She has far too high an opinion, both of her friend's honourable nature and of his generosity of heart, to believe him capable of taking advantage of his acquaintance with her secret to intentionally behave towards her with scant respect; but she is also too shrewd a woman not to be well aware that the man who happens unfortunately to be the depositary of a secret such as hers, can hardly fail to have his manner towards her influenced thereby. Mr. Scobell, besides, was somewhat deficient, despite his love of 'art' and generally æsthetic tastes, in that most valuable, but utterly indescribable, as well as unteachable, quality called *tact.* His manner was at all times and to all persons one which did little justice to the real refinement of his nature. Could he have imagined it possible that his friendly familiarity with herself and her child sometimes jarred against Claudine's nerves and feelings, he would at once, and without an *arrière pensée*, have endeavoured to change his bearing towards her for one more reserved and deferential. Madame Wolkersdorf was, as well he knew, one of the last of living women to, as the phrase goes, 'stand upon her rank;' nor did she ever expect to be (on account of her 'position' in society) treated with

more than the due respect which every well-bred man is more than willing to pay to a lady of 'gentil' birth. It was his conviction that the woman whose sorrows he so sincerely pitied, and whose search after her lost son he was devoting his energies and his time to further, was one whose mental constitution was true and noble, that so keenly enlisted his sympathies in her behalf. The accession of Claudine Montez to rank and fortune had not—such was the exceptional character of her idiosyncrasy—succeeded in imbuing her with any of the littlenesses which are amongst the outcomes of luxury and civilization. The Princess Wolkersdorf, rich, beautiful, and 'the fashion,' remained in many respects a 'child of nature' still.

CHAPTER XIX.

'Still in my soul that cry goes on :
For ever gone ! For ever gone !'
The Golden Legend.

EASTER has come and gone, the London season is advancing towards its zenith, and the fair foreigner, of whose birth and antecedents so little is, in fact, known, has been, by the leaders of rank and fashion, warmly welcomed into their midst. Behold her now as, in the thronged Hyde Park drive, she, with her young daughter by her side, leans back languidly in her open carriage, listening with apparent *insouciance* to the attempts at being entertaining which the men who are leaning over the carriage-door—for the coachman has drawn up his high-stepping brown horses by the railing's side—are making.

The eyes of Princess Wolkersdorf are, in truth, as well as her attention, on other objects and

thoughts intent. She is seeking—as when is she not so seeking?—in the crowd of human faces around her for her son. She believes, and such has ever been her conviction, that she will, when the blissful moment for which she has so long waited shall arrive, recognise her lost darling by his likeness to his father. It has never occurred to her that the boy—a man of three-and-twenty, now!—may possibly have had transmitted to him the lineaments of her who gave him birth; and, even had such a notion crossed her mind, in what would it have availed her? Can anything be more vague and cloudy than the ideas which we all of us have formed of our own personal appearance? whilst, as to retaining in our minds a photographic likeness of the face which we see daily in our dressing-mirrors, *that* effort of memory will, I think, be by most of us acknowledged to be unachievable. It may, perhaps, be the occasion of some surprise to my readers that the possibility of Gerald Mainwaring being the son of whom she was in search was an idea that had never presented itself to Claudine's mental view. When, however, we consider the extraordinary circumstances attendant on the imposition which had been, for the child and his *dead* mother's sake, practised by D'Arcy—when we remember, too, the precautions

which had been taken to insure secrecy, and the little likelihood which existed that a bride in the first flush of her married happiness would have consented to adopt as her own, and to the possible injury of any children who might be born to her, the son of her husband's former mistress—can we wonder that the contingency to which I have alluded should never have obtruded itself on the mind of the Octoroon?

The woman's perfect confidence, not only in Mr. Scobell's sympathy, but in his shrewdness and knowledge of the world, also contributed not a little to throw, in this case, 'dust' in her eyes. He was, as well she knew, the intimate associate of the young owner of Wroxbourne, and had the faintest suspicion of the truth even stirred within her breast, the answer would have been at once forthcoming. '*He* entertains no such fancy. Were it otherwise, he would long ere this have made me a sharer in the conjectures which, during so lengthened a period of intimacy, he may have been forming.' In thus deciding, however, she would have done scant justice either to her friend's prudence, or to his thoughtful consideration for her feelings, seeing that, if the truth must be told—and to tell it is, methinks, the wisest course—the quick-witted American does greatly incline to the belief, he

having busily employed himself in putting two and two together, that Gerald Mainwaring—a sinless impostor, if ever such existed—is not what he seems!

To more than one cause may be attributed the reticence which Mr. Scobell had in this instance displayed. He had shrunk with almost womanly timidity from the imprudence of raising, in the breast of the long-suffering and long-waiting mother, hopes which in the end might prove fallacious. And then there was the poor fellow himself! A youth, for he was little more, into whose family history and mental proclivities he (Scobell) had—with no bad intentions, certainly, but the act which he had perpetrated remained the same—peered and pried; how could he, without bitter shame and confusion of face, be the one to open out before the eyes of this unsuspecting and high-minded young friend the abyss of shame and misery which now was hidden from his eyes? The day might come—and, despite his strong interest in, and the fealty which he owed to the Princess, he often found himself wishing that such a state of things might never happen—when doubt would be swallowed up in certainty, and when he would feel bound in honour to inform Claudine that he had found her son. Such a state

of things, however, was, he hoped, as distant as its existence was problematical. Madame Wolkersdorf had both seen and been introduced to Gerald Mainwaring, and on each occasion of their meeting Mr. Scobell had been present, and had carefully watched the countenance of the woman whose likeness to the young man beside her was, although not what could be called a 'striking' one, nevertheless sufficiently evident to a stander-by who, as was the case with the American, *almost* believed in the near relationship between the pair. He had not once taken his eyes from the languid, yet passionate orbs, which looked with frank admiration at Gerald's handsome face, and it gladdened him to feel that, whilst the *woman* gazed approvingly, no sweet, yet silent voice whispered to the *mother* that her search was over, and that he who had been so long lost was found at last.

It was, perhaps, fortunate for the big American's peace of mind that Rosie, the little chatterer who was popularly supposed to be incapable of 'keeping anything' to herself, had been true to her word, and had abstained from initiating her devoted admirer into the secrets of the Belgrave Square nursery. Had the girl been less prudently reticent, Claudine's trusted friend, feeling that now 'assurance was made doubly

sure,' could no longer have felt justified in withholding from her the discovery which, while it would fill the mother's heart with joy unspeakable, must, should she be either unable or unwilling to keep her happiness a secret, be the cause to others of bitter shame and sorrow.

Since we parted with Gerald, who, sad at heart, was unable, in that he had a sympathizing listener to his sorrows, to conceal the condition of his mind, more than one event, important to those concerned, has taken place in what must now be called his uncongenial home. He remained for a fortnight at Herondale, and, during that period, the ill-fated infant, whose entrance into this world of care had been already productive of trouble and dissension, had been removed, under the care of an efficient nurse, into the country. Aunt Madge had been thoroughly in earnest when she proposed to take possession of the child, and bring it up under her own auspices, a 'thing,' as she declared, 'of her own, to love, and to interest her.' The arrangement of the affair did not prove difficult. Rosie's letter to her brother-in-law, in which she had described Vinca's meeting with her little son, had effectually lulled to rest any mistaken ideas which Gerald might, in the simplicity of his heart, have previously entertained regarding the maternal feelings of his

wife; and Miss Fielden, who saw 'things as they were,' and whose perceptions were certainly not rendered less acute through partiality for the woman whom she inwardly designated as selfish and cold-hearted, arrived without an hour's delay at the determination to remove as soon as possible the unwelcome little 'unfortunate' from the neighbourhood of its unloving parent. Happily for the success of her plans, Aunt Madge's income, though far from large, which she had inherited from her former admirer, had long been as independent of extraneous control as was (a fact that had on various occasions been proved) the strength of her will to act on all occasions according to her own judgment.

Neither the 'Squire,' as Mr. Fielden was in the neighbourhood of Herondale called, nor his quiet, practical wife, viewed with favour the projected establishment in their near neighbourhood of a child which, they persisted in asserting, had no claim whatever either on their interest or their compassion. To this view of the matter Aunt Madge entirely demurred. The part which her parents had taken in the adoption of Gerald Mainwaring as his father's lawful son, had, in their daughter's opinion, rendered them unquestionably morally responsible for any evils

which might be consequent on the act. Gerald had been dear as a son to her sister, surely, therefore, his neglected child ought, she argued, to come in for a share in their affection and regard.

'I shall not act thus for love of the Brudenells, mother, you may be sure of that,' she said. 'I can see plainly through their motives for wishing the child away; and they are purely cruelly selfish. With the exception of Rosie, it is fear of what may be said to the disparagement of the family which will make them jump at my offer. I would rather, I am afraid, had I liberty to choose, *not* gratify Mrs. Brudenell by the removal of a possible impediment to the marriages of her daughters; and it does, indeed, pain me that you and my father should be troubled by my crotchet; but when it comes to a mother wishing for her own infant's death——'

'My dear!' exclaimed Mrs. Fielden, holding up her hands in horror, 'how *can* you speak of anything so dreadful? Gerald's wife may be—and I dare say she is—cold and heartless; but that such a thought should have come into her head is too impossible to be believed.'

'Perhaps so. I will hope you are right; but nevertheless I cannot help suspecting that the remark that fell from Vinca's lips, and which Rosie did not and probably *could* not repeat to

Gerald, had reference to "something happening," as the saying is, to the child. Do not mistake me,' she added, with a smile. 'I do not suspect them of anything worse than neglect and lack of love; now, at old Hooper's cottage, and with only two miles between us and it, the poor infant will not suffer from want of care, and the fact that it is "Master Gerald's" child will at once open to it the hearts of the kind-hearted ones.'

And so, after much discussion, during which Aunt Madge steadily kept to her point, the affair was settled. Mrs. Craik's fastidious eyes were no longer shocked by the presence in her domain of a baby so utterly unworthy of her own high repute, and little Claudia was left to wonder whether the same fairies who had introduced a 'baby brudder' to the nursery had been also instrumental in the unkind act of spiriting him away.

With every mile that brought him nearer to his home, Gerald, far from feeling the abounding joy with which the near prospect of seeing again his young wife ought to have filled his breast, grew more and more low-spirited and nervous. He could not, even to his dear Aunt Madge, have described the sensations which caused him to fear, to an extent that was almost puerile, his first meeting with Vinca. The kiss which he

had given her at parting had not only been returned, but had brought a smile to her pale lips —a smile which he had carried with him on his way, to brighten and to cheer him. During the fortnight, however, which he had passed at Herondale, no direct message, no word of remembrance had he received from her, and yet he, her image being never long absent from his thoughts, had, day by day, as regularly as the post hour came round, indited to his correspondent, Rosie, a few tender words, which the poor fellow fondly hoped would bring to him in response some written crumbs of comfort. But he had hoped in vain! What wonder, therefore, that, as the hour of meeting drew nearer and more near, the heart within his bosom should have felt anything but light?

It came—that moment on which his thoughts had been—in spite of all his efforts to the contrary—so morbidly brooding, and the husband's worst fears were realized. Cold as ice were Vinca's look and manner, as she, with evident reluctance, permitted him to touch with his lips her half-averted cheek; and as she lay, looking in her delicate pallor more beautiful than ever, upon the couch in her dressing-room, the idol of poor Gerald's heart made the fact that *he* was not wanted there very speedily apparent to him.

His case was a cruelly hard one, and even those who may be inclined, seeing how poor a battle against his fate he made, to despise a man so yielding and so weak, must surely pity whilst they scorn him. There was so much in *his* nature of a woman's softness, a woman's pleasure in self-abnegation, a woman's tender clinging to the one beloved; whilst in *hers*, on the contrary, there was a hard man's coldness, his love of power, and his enviable capacity for enjoying existence *without* the love which to many a woman, and, as in poor Gerald's case, to some amongst the stronger sex, 'serves' (*vide* Longfellow) 'both for food and raiment.'

CHAPTER XX.

'I'll read you matter deep and dangerous.'
SHAKESPEARE.

AMONGST the many equestrians who on the bright spring day of which I have already spoken have drawn up in the open space where commences what is called the 'Lady's Mile,' is Gerald Mainwaring. He is there, as what man is not? for a purpose—or purposes—important or otherwise, as the case may be, but one which, whether the object aimed at is simply to see and to be seen, is sufficiently powerful to cause the crowd of well-dressed, well-mounted loungers to remain for no inconsiderable length of time stationary at their posts of observation. Amidst that throng of fashionable idlers, there was perhaps, with the exception of Gerald, not one whose motives for glancing curiously at each carriage as it approached was purely domestic and unselfish; indeed, could the suggestion have arisen amongst

them that a man so handsome and so young could be simply watching with anxious eyes for the arrival upon the scene of his *wife*, the majority of those present would probably have laughed the idea to scorn.

Yet so, in fact, it was! Vinca, a lovely convalescent now, is, on this especial Saturday, to take in the Park (accompanied by her mother) her first drive since her confinement; and Gerald, whose love for her is, unfortunately for himself, far too deeply seated for even her repellent behaviour towards him to shake it from its place, is waiting to catch the first glimpse of the pale but exquisite face of his, alas! unloving wife. Strange, perhaps, to say, he had never yet connected Vinca's change of manner towards himself, her coldness, and the 'distance' at which it was her evident plan to keep him, with any feelings on her part of which the repulsive appearance of her child might be the cause. In point of fact, however, Vinca, who had sorrowed far more than had apparently been the case over the lack of comeliness in her firstborn, had, when her eyes first rested on her infant son, experienced so strong a sensation of disgust and horror that a feeling allied to hatred of the father became the almost natural consequence. The sins of the progenitors were in very truth being visited on the son!

But it is time that we return to the Park, and to the unfortunate victim of a parent's faults. Almost within hailing distance of the pretty but decidedly *exotic*-looking carriage in which Princess Wolkersdorf and her daughter are seated, and leaning towards the latter, with eyes fixed in evident admiration on her fair young face, stands, with his arm resting on the carriage door, Lord Arthur Clayton. He is no new acquaintance, and is now, in fact, but following up a something more *real* than mere flirtation which he had commenced some months before in Paris. He was, as we are aware, no tyro in the lore which stands men such as he in good stead when the object to be secured is woman's love; and Dacia's heart, poor child, had truly been as an open page to him. He left her, knowing well that she would fret and pine during his absence, and realizing also, as clearly as though he had seen the process working, the fact that the well-known abhorrence of nature to a vacuum would produce its normal effect upon her. As in very truth it did, for from the hour when Lord Arthur quitted Paris to that when in London the girl's eyes first rested upon his, her habitual quietude of manner had deepened into sadness, and smiles were strangers to her lips.

But she is happy now! The lovely languid

ɜ are (not continuously, for Dacia is shy, and ·e is a fire in her lover's gaze which she half s to meet) raised ever and anon, with the ɜionate earnestness that is 'the badge of her e,' and also the legacy from her Spanish ɜstors, to his face. Claudine is taking no pre- ; heed of the little by-play which is going on de her. She is glad that her young daughter uld have a *prétendant*, one too of high degree, if his brother, poor weakly Lord Burslem, e to die, Lord Arthur would be heir to the ·quisate of Darlington. The Princess is very ɜh in the dark regarding English titles of ility, but she feels convinced that the Prince husband, proud though he was of his own ɜstry, would, if it were possible for his ɜened brain to receive any fresh impressions, ɜatisfied with the connections of his would-be ·in-law. That Lord Arthur's attentions are r *le bon motif*, Madame Wolkersdorf never for oment doubts. Princess Dacia, rich, beauti- and highly born, is in a widely different tion from that of the slave maiden to whom rcy Mainwaring whispered, under Southern s, his love dreams; and therefore it is that ıgh the fiery passions of her race speak in ia's wondrous eyes, no fears for her well- ıg assail the mother's heart. Least of all

could she have imagined that amongst that moving phalanx of fashionably-dressed women her pretty Dacia had a deadly enemy! And yet, had her eyes chanced to rest upon a gloomily beautiful face, blue-eyed and pale, the owner of which, leaning back in an open carriage, had twice passed close beside the spot where Dacia's handsome lover was whispering sweetest flatteries in her ear, methinks that the expression, dark and vengeful, of that woman's face, as the girl's soft eyes met those of Lord Arthur Clayton, would to the mother's loving heart have told a tale.

Mrs. Mainwaring's carriage, driven at foot-pace along the closely-serried ranks of vehicles, has twice turned at the spot where the group of equestrians, female as well as male, are assembled, and on neither occasion has she shown any signs of recognising amongst them the presence of her husband. She is now again out of sight, and Gerald, feeling perhaps that for the moment, at least, the cup of his mortification is full, is preparing to leave the Park, when, on passing as he necessarily does Princess Wolkersdorf's carriage, its elder occupant beckons him to her side. In his present mood of mind he would have preferred solitude, but his nature not being made of such stern stuff as would have enabled him to

resist the gracious smile with which the invitation to approach was accompanied, another moment found him by the lady's side.

'You are not surely going away, Mr. Mainwaring, from all this charming company,' she, in her attractive broken English, and when they had shaken hands, said to him. 'It is too soon to leave, with so many pretty ladies dressed like butterflies about; besides, I had hoped that you would bring to me your *petillante* sister Rosie, who is so good for my grave Dacia to be with; and your wife too, I hope to know her soon, and then I shall ask her my little question about Rosie. Can you guess, Mr. Mainwaring,' she asks, in a lower tone, 'what that little question is?'

The smile with which the Princess puts her query is responded to by Gerald as he says, in a voice which his auditor thinks singularly pleasant:

'Mrs. Mainwaring will be flattered, Princess, I am sure, by being thought able to give you any information upon any subject; just at present, however, she is still something of an invalid, —only just beginning, you know, to go about again; but if *I* can answer any question—Rosie is quite like a sister to me—I shall be only too happy.'

know quite well what you are going to say. That the idea of caring for a man thirty years her senior—a man, too, who is awkward and ungainly, and does not know what to do with his limbs—being acceptable to a girl of Miss Rosie's age, is simply ridiculous; but, Mr. Mainwaring, you must remember that the man is clever, can talk well, and has eyes which have the strange power given them to reach and stir a woman's heart. Then, too, as I have heard, they have been thrown much together, and she, being so young and open-hearted, may have thoughtlessly given rise to hopes in him which now she has not courage to dispel. It is in a mistake such as this that lies the danger, for she *must* not marry him. I cannot tell you why, nor must you ask me for my reasons, only I charge you, if you love the girl, and have her happiness at heart, to save her from a marriage with Westhrop Scobell.'

She had spoken with an energy, and at the same time a seriousness of purpose, which had startled Gerald, and effectually suppressed any tendency on his part, had such existed, to take an amused view of the question she had raised. The possibility of a love affair between Rosie and the American had never yet occurred to him, but the surprise which the idea occasioned

was for the moment deadened by his astonishment at Princess Wolkersdorf's interference, and at the almost vehement words which she had, whilst expressing her disapproval of any engagement between this incongruous pair, made use of. Was it possible, he asked himself—and as the notion flashed across his brain, he experienced, he knew not why, a momentary sensation of annoyance—that the Princess entertained for the man, whose peculiarities she had so truthfully described, any feeling warmer than that of friendship? To imagine any other cause was difficult, whilst to give a satisfactory reply seemed a still harder task. He contrived, however, to answer shyly, and not without hesitation, that he had never noticed anything in Rosie Brudenell which could lead him to suppose that she was attached to Scobell. He could not conceive the possibility of her being so, and should certainly, were she to ask his opinion, endeavour, as far as lay in his power, to dissuade her from even thinking of a marriage so foolish and so unnatural.

He had spoken strongly, gaining courage as he proceeded, but Claudine, whose alarm for the safety of her secret is the paramount feeling in her breast, cannot rest satisfied with the promise he had given her, and continues to press upon

him the necessity of putting a stop to what she declares is a dangerous intimacy.

'The child will grow to love him,' she says eagerly; 'and, what is far more fatal, she will grow to *fear* him. The man whom a woman loves much, she is always, in some degree, afraid of. She likes to feel that he is the stronger of the two, and can protect and do her service. If he gives way to her fancies and treats her like a queen, she will not care for him one half so much; and it is because this Scobell may be as a king to her that your sister is in peril.'

'I will do my best to save her,' Gerald says gravely, for the Princess has by the last few sentences she has spoken opened out to him a new view of his own domestic position, its possible causes, and the remedies which *might*, even now, be successfully employed for its improvement; 'I promise you that I will do my best, and that I will enlist my wife and the rest of her family in the cause against our friend. For he, too, with a wife so young and giddy, could not hope for happiness; and indeed I like him far too much to wish him to be my brother-in-law.'

After this but few words passed between them. Princess Wolkersdorf, after warmly shaking hands with her companion, re-seated

herself by Dacia's side, whilst Gerald, his smooth young forehead wrinkled by lines of thought and care, rode slowly homeward, dwelling mentally on a colloquy which it was his purpose to hold that very evening with his wife.

CHAPTER XXI.

> 'Yet I do fear thy nature.
> It is too full of the milk of human kindness
> To catch the nearest way.'
>
> SHAKESPEARE.

THAT saying of Princess Wolkersdorf's that fear is a wholesome element in the feelings of a wife towards her husband, had given Gerald much food for reflection. He began to think, and the thought was not a pleasant one, that in his weak idolatry of Vinca lay the secret of his unhappiness as a husband. He had, to borrow Princess Wolkersdorf's expression, treated her 'like a queen,' when he himself should have been 'lord paramount' and king. It was not in his character to dwell upon the advantages which Nature and Fortune had bestowed upon him, and yet, almost in his own despite, he found himself remembering that, as it had been in his power to endow Vinca with many of the good things of

this life, he had possessed something approaching to a right to take a higher place in his *ménage* than he had as yet ventured to do. 'As yet!' The words, though spoken inly, and to his own breast alone, sounded through that secret chamber as a suggestive warning, a hint, in short, that it might not yet be impossible for him to retrieve the errors of the past, and assume towards his wife the attitude of one to whom 'obedience,' 'love,' and 'honour,' had been by her, at God's altar, duly sworn.

As the reader, who has been early initiated into the weaknesses of my hero's idiosyncrasy, will find no difficulty in believing, the task that he proposed to himself to do, would present obstacles which the very nature of the man must render almost insuperable. There was so little in him of the power of self-assertion, and his somewhat sensuous, as well as indolent nature would render it well-nigh impossible for him to keep watchful guard over the encroachments of a woman whose love of sway was great, and who had already drunk of the intoxicating cup which, in the brains of despots, whether they be great or small, works madness. His whole and sole desire, he being thus unfortunately constituted, was to exist in a sunlit atmosphere of peace and love. Of the latter blessing he, poor fellow, had

for some time past enjoyed but little, and he had begun—more than begun, indeed, so pertinacious and so undisguised had been Vinca's coldness—to believe that the halcyon days of the past were over for him, and that he must endeavour to rest contented with the *stone*, which, when he asked for *bread*, had been his portion. His conversation with Madame Wolkersdorf had, however, as we are aware, produced a singular effect upon his mind, and, as he rode at a leisurely pace towards his home, he laid the flattering unction to his soul that a change of system must be productive of good results, and that Vinca's love, when he should have ceased to be the slave of her caprices, would be restored to him.

Ah, well-a-day for the vain hopes of 'insect man!' How far was poor Gerald from suspecting, the while he pictured to himself his lovely Vinca once more tender and lavish of her caresses as in their early marriage days she had been, that he had never gained her love, and that her motives in marrying him had been simply mercenary! Poor lad! for in truth he is—being so young of heart, and in experience so deficient—but little more; he may plan and may project—may lay a thousand schemes to attain the wished-for end, but all in vain, so true it is that

'He who stems a stream with sand,
And fetters flame with flaxen band,
Has yet a harder task to prove—
By stern resolve to conquer love.'

Any delay in the execution of his project was, in Gerald's present frame of mind, an evil impossible of endurance. He would, he told himself, commence, immediately on his wife's return, the novel system of love-regaining of which his brain was full, and with this purpose working upon nerves so sensitive that he already felt his pulses throb painfully under the influence of the anticipated scene, he watched and waited. Not, strange to say, altogether unhappily, and yet the very step upon the stairs of the discontented convalescent, and the sound of her peevish voice, as she, before her entrance, gave an order to her maid, might have warned the husband that he could hardly have chosen, for the commencement of his essay, a less auspicious time than the one on which he had fixed his mind. Vinca's mood was the reverse of amiable. She had inspected the cards of inquiry which had been left since her indisposition, and the result had been unsatisfactory, for Mrs. Mainwaring belonged to the class of women (and their name is legion) who, if they cannot climb to the topmost boughs of the social tree, are apt to view

with discontent, and eke disgust, the *habitats*, often pleasanter and safer, in which on the lower branches of the said tree they may have found shelter. That there were to be found on her visiting list so few names, comparatively speaking, which belonged to the potent world of fashion and of rank, she attributed not only to Gerald's lukewarmness in the matter, but to the pernicious doctrines of 'that vulgar Republican, Mr. Westhrop Scobell;' and her feelings towards either gentleman were not pleasantly influenced by her conviction that so it was.

But this was not the only, as it certainly was not the most cogent, reason for the heavy cloud which had settled on Vinca's brow, and of the surging in her breast of the most dangerous passion which can possess a woman. This passion, as I think I need not say, was jealousy. The sight of Lord Arthur—of the man whom she had groundlessly believed she had ceased to love—exerting the powers of fascination which she so well remembered were irresistible, in order to gain the heart of 'that insipid-looking, childish thing,' for it was thus that Mrs. Gerald in her anger spoke of Princess Dacia, had stung her to the quick. His eyes, so engrossed was he with this new conquest, had never once rested upon *her*. Three times, although in her still

somewhat enfeebled condition the sight had sickened her well-nigh to faintness, had her coachman, following the orders she had given him, driven slowly past the carriage in which the mother and daughter—themselves the observed of all observers—looked on at the, to them, novel and attractive scene; then, of a sudden, the place which the foreign-looking equipage had occupied was empty, and Vinca, her brain in a whirl of passionate excitement, could only catch a glimpse, as the powerful, highbred horses trotted rapidly towards Kensington, of Lord Arthur Clayton's profile, as, seated in front of the two Princesses, he bent his head forward, in the act, as Mrs. Mainwaring justly decided, of playing the agreeable to them both.

It was fated that after contemplating this, to Vinca, most exasperating sight, she (on entering the pretty 'morning-room,' which it was her boast to keep 'sacred from intruders,') should find herself at once confronted by her husband. It would be their first meeting that day, for, although her hapless infant was now fully a month old, Vinca still clung to her invalid habits, and in her 'morning-room' her meals were habitually served. Mrs. Brudenell, who viewed with no little disapproval both her daughter's proceeding in this respect, and the line of con-

duct which she had adopted towards her husband, had more than once ventured upon a mild remonstrance. Entirely, however, without effect, for Vinca was fully determined to persevere in the course she had decided on, that course being, as her mother plainly perceived, to 'fix,' if possible, a 'great gulf' between herself and Gerald.

Mrs. Brudenell, who was not wholly deficient in the softer feelings, had become very sorry for her son-in-law. She was capable of appreciating the grace of his manner, and his uniform courtesy, displayed in somewhat of a foreign fashion, towards herself; nor did she totally fail to comprehend how deeply one so sensitive as was Gerald must suffer under the treatment to which he was being subjected.

'If he would only turn upon her!' Such was Mrs. Brudenell's frequent, yet unspoken aspiration, when her daughter, allowing her formidable temper to get the better of her discretion, had treated with scant respect the man to whom she owed so much. When alone with Gerald, and especially during their frequent *tête-à-tête* meals, Mrs. Brudenell had endeavoured to account for, and, as far as lay in her power, find excuses for Vinca's conduct. She had done so on the previous evening, when the latter, having obstinately refused to allow Gerald to accom-

pany her in her drive, it had become necessary to explain to the mortified husband that it was 'a case of nerves,' and that, as the whole thing worried 'poor Vinca' in her 'weak state' terribly, perhaps Mr. Mainwaring would kindly wait till the afternoon before paying his daily visit to his wife. To this proposition he had agreed, and was now, not without a very considerable amount of inward perturbation, awaiting the moment when, by the long delayed process of 'turning' upon the oppressor, the trodden-upon one might hope to obtain the kind of footing in his household which even the meekest amongst men would hardly, methinks, be willing to dispense with.

CHAPTER XXII.

> 'Love may sink by slow decay,
> But by sudden wrench believe not
> Hearts can thus be torn away.'
>
> BYRON.

IT was impossible to be more thoroughly unprepared for a coming scene than was Vinca when she, having deposited her mother in the Hillary Street lodgings, with the interior of which she had herself not yet condescended to make acquaintance, slowly mounted the stairs that led to her own apartments. Although she had passed him by apparently unheeded, Mrs. Mainwaring had not failed to notice her husband amongst the group of equestrians who were remaining stationary, the reins hanging loosely upon their patient horses' necks, the while their riders—some through motives of idle curiosity, and others actuated by private and, to them, doubtless all-important reasons of their own—were watching the moving throng.

Vinca's start of surprise (she believing Gerald to be still in the Park) was, on her entering her especial sanctum, as much assumed as real. She felt in truth slightly 'taken aback' by what she chose to consider an act of intrusion on her husband's part, and the somewhat exaggerated 'stare' of astonishment which she summoned to her eyes was intended to convey to him a hint that his presence in her apartment was as unauthorised as it was unwelcome. Whether or not the silent rebuke struck home she had no opportunity of deciding, for on her appearance the interloper had at once risen from his chair, and, taking her stiffly-offered hand in his, had touched her half-averted forehead with his lips.

'And how did the drive go off, dear?' he asks, calmly in appearance, although he is conscious that the blood is coursing over-rapidly through his frame. 'The day was lovely, was it not? Surely an air so pure and balmy must have invigorated and refreshed you.'

'It is rather soon to judge of that,' she says. 'I am tired now. Perhaps I may feel better for an hour's rest. If you will kindly ring the bell for Eulalie, I will see what quiet and the sofa may do towards refreshing me after my fatigue.'

The hint for him to depart was clear as noonday sun, and only so late as yesterday, he

would—such is the force of habit—have lost not a moment in obeying her behests; but yesterday and to-day are widely different. *Now* he has resolved (is there much chance, think you, that he will win the victory?) to take the reins of government into his own hands, and teach this autocratic lady that a wife's duty is submission. But he will be very gentle with her. Ah me! when was this poor fellow—the descendant of the most patient race in the world—otherwise than mild and gentle? She shall not even surmise his intentions; only by slow degrees, and very tenderly, shall she be made to love and 'fear' him.

'My darling,' he begins, making no movement —a circumstance which infinitely surprises her —to carry out her wishes, 'is it quite necessary that Eulalie should come? This room is the prettiest and most comfortable in all the house; may not I stay and share it with you? You shall be perfectly undisturbed. I have to read up the last *Fortnightly*. See! I have brought it with me from the library—so lie down at once, and be sure that I will let no one come to break your rest.'

Vinca's look of astonishment is, on hearing this proposal, thoroughly genuine; but she is quick of wit, and at once perceives—though, for that matter, a child, Gerald being so poor an actor,

might have done the same—that there is planned rebellion in the air. The idea seems to her simply ludicrous, and she would at a brighter moment have smiled as it flashed across her brain. She is, however, in no mood for laughter now; Gerald's incipient rising against her rule must be at once suppressed, and she therefore, speaking with the kind of languid hauteur which has lately characterized her mode of speech, says, as she makes a movement towards the bell:

'Thanks, but I won't trouble you. It is Eulalie whom I require, and, if you will please be so kind, my room to myself.'

Her fingers are on the bell handle, but Gerald is too quick for her. Laying a light touch on her arm, he says, with an attempt at firmness, but Vinca's 'needle-witted' ear detects a slight tremor in his voice:

'I have something first to say to you, dear Vinca, a something,' he adds, with a half smile, 'which Princess Wolkersdorf, who has been talking to me, seems to consider important enough to call for immediate discussion.'

'I think,' interrupts Vinca petulantly, 'that Princess Wolkersdorf might have done me the honour to leave her card on me, intimate as she is with your bosom friend, Scobell, and as *you* seem to be with her.'

'But I am not intimate with the Princess,' the poor foolish fellow hastens to say; thus throwing away a chance which a man more experienced than he in women's wiles would have quickly caught at; for jealousy may exist where love does not, and many a wife who cares infinitely less for her husband than for the 'toy dog' which she fondles in her lap, would not only stoutly defend her right to his exclusive possession, but might (so apt are we to set a value on what others prize, and may deprive us of) feel for the moment a spurious passion for the object of another woman's love. Claudine's son, we may be well assured, is in regard to anomalies such as these hopelessly ignorant, and this being so, he with quite unnecessary candour proceeds to explain that his acquaintance with Madame Wolkersdorf is so very slight that her request to him for a few minutes' private conversation took him completely by surprise.

'A surprise,' he goes on to say, 'which was by no means lessened when I found that the topic of conversation was a supposed love affair between your sister Rosie and Mr. Scobell. *You* will laugh, of course, as I felt inclined to do, at the bare idea of there being anything between them; but the Princess, for some private reason, I suppose, of her own, and one which I could not

of course attempt to fathom, took quite a serious view of the matter, and has requested me to do all I can to check the intimacy between Rosie and her big ally, which has unfortunately given rise to these rather ridiculous surmises.'

Vinca, who, notwithstanding her professed fatigue, has remained standing, with her arms folded on the back of a *prie Dieu*, and an air of scornful indifference manifest in her entire bearing, rejoins, as she raises her blue eyes in unflinching coldness to her husband's face:

'And what, may I ask, are you thinking of doing? Shall you begin by attacking Rosie? or shall you go first to your friend and tell him that in making a child like her grow fond of him he is behaving like a scoundrel? It is all your fault,' raising her voice, and allowing her real feelings on the subject to appear. 'If you had not taken him up—invited him to Wroxbourne—and allowed him to be like a tame cat about the house, nothing of this kind would have happened.'

'I am not singular in my liking for Mr. Scobell's society. I know no one, no foreigner at least, who is more appreciated in the best sets in London (I am of course not speaking of the merely fashionable and frivolous world) than he is. And you should remember, dear Vinca,' he

adds, whilst, leaning his elbow on the mantelpiece, he mechanically smoothes a cigarette which he is longing to smoke in peace, 'that the intimacy with Mr. Scobell began with you and with your people.'

'Pshaw! a mere boarding-house acquaintance that could easily have been shaken off! You might as well say that every snob one happens to sit next to at a *table d'hôte* is to be bowed to in the street next day.'

'The cases are not exactly parallel,' Gerald, who is courageous in defence of a friend whom he really values, says gravely. 'Scobell is no snob, and Rosie has told me of many acts of kindness, which—but he would hate, as I do, to remember money obligations—only I cannot understand those who have received such not doing their utmost to show their gratitude for past kindness and generosity.'

A shrug of her graceful shoulders precedes Mrs. Mainwaring's answer to this apostrophe; then she says, with a sarcastic smile:

'What he did was, I suppose, undertaken for his own pleasure fully as much as for ours, and certainly does not excuse his hanging upon us in the way he has done. As for Princess Wolkersdorf taking up a matter with which she has nothing whatever to do, one can only sup-

pose that she has a *tendresse* for the man herself. Really, though, I have had enough for the present of Mr. Scobell and his *amourettes;* and if you——'

She stops suddenly, and it is evident to Gerald that she has been about to give utterance to words which her better judgment cautions her to leave unsaid. They are words, probably, which may wring his heart to listen to; nevertheless, the same perversity which induces us to look upon an object from which our nature shrinks, causes him to say, and to say, too, with a ring of passion in his voice which altogether changes its character:

'Pray end your sentence, Vinca. It is better, far better, that I should know all that is in your mind—all that you wish, that is to say, regarding our—our relations with each other. I have been a coward hitherto—a coward because of the weak, slavish love which I have felt for you, and which has so deadened my sense of what is due to my own honour, that I have submitted to treatment on your part which is as unbecoming in you as it is disrespectful to me.'

His powers of self-control desert him suddenly after uttering these few brave words. The strain upon his sensitive nerves and feelings has been too great, and his voice, the tremor audible in which

had been gradually increasing, fails altogether to obey his will. What would have been the effect on Vinca of these words had the manner in which they had been delivered been more in accordance with the newly born vigour of purpose which they evinced, it is hard to say; certain, however, it is that the few brief sentences which had been wrung at such a cruel cost of suffering from poor Gerald's aching heart, produced no effect whatever either upon her feelings or upon the determination to which she had arrived. To reveal to him in plain words what that determination was had proved a task which required more courage, as well as a still more hard and selfish heart than that which beat in Vinca's bosom, to enable her to perform. If he would only perceive that she, who had never loved him, almost loathed him now, what a world of trouble might be spared to both! Her nature —cold and vain and calculating—rendered her perfectly incapable of comprehending the depth of passion which smouldered beneath the calm exterior and almost languid bearing which characterized the man whom she had sworn to love. 'Surely,' she mentally decided, 'when he has made the discovery which ought to be pretty clear to him by this time, he will—well, take things as they are, and make the best of them.

I shall not—he may depend on that—interfere with his dearly-loved peace and quiet, but he must be made to understand that I expect to enjoy a similar immunity myself.'

The words which Gerald had just spoken, though they have failed either to soften Vinca's heart or prick her conscience, have nevertheless awakened her to the necessity of making her meaning more clearly understood. She is, moreover, angry now. This hitherto subdued and patient vassal has made use of expressions which call the blood to her pale cheek, and brighten the dreamy lustre of her large blue eyes. She has the courage which anger, after the manner of exciting drinks, has the power to lend; and so, her face lit with a flame which adds to its great beauty, she says, with a slow scorn which seems to chill the blood in Gerald's veins:

'I do not understand you. Has anything occurred during your ride, besides your silly talk with Princess Wolkersdorf, to produce this wonderful burst of eloquence? What can be your meaning when you speak of disrespect? The absence of good manners is, I think, an offence of which I might accuse *you*—you, who remain here contrary to my wish, and have even prevented me from ringing my own bell to summon my own maid!'

At this moment—so entirely are we unaccountable for the 'idle thoughts' which dart with lightning speed across our brain—a vision of the Hillary Street *ménage*, and of many another similar abode—inhabited, according to Rosie (before the Graye Street episode), by that young person's family—flits swiftly before Gerald's mental sight. No 'bell,' no '*boudoir*,' and no *Eulalie* had the peerless Vinca then to boast of. *He* had given her *all*, and this was his reward! Gerald is of far too generous a nature for a reflection such as this to be more than a momentary visitant to his breast; but short as was its stay, the work which it performed was good, for the husband who has so long submitted in silence to the wife's assumption of superiority is in his turn stirred to wrath, and passion, like 'a draught of new wine,' gives him also courage to speak his mind out boldly. Gerald was, as I have already said, 'slow to anger;' but when the fire was once kindled, it burned fiercely, and, after the manner of the 'devouring element,' did its work.

His face, perfect in its beauty as that of a Greek statue, is now pale almost to lividness, but there is no symptom of wavering in his voice, as he says slowly, and with his dark eyes fixed upon his young wife's face:

'We will not waste our moments in discussing

the question as to which of us is the most deficient in *savoir faire,* for I have something of slightly more importance to say to you. The time, it appears to me, has come, when we should arrive at a definite understanding. Has it come to this, that, as your husband, you have grown tired of my companionship?'

To this home question Vinca at first makes no reply; but on its being repeated, she answers in a low voice in the affirmative.

'And you desire that our relations as man and wife shall cease?'

Again hesitation, and again almost in a whisper, she utters the two words which—although she suspects it not—decide her destiny!

'I do.'

The room in which this colloquy takes place has view upon a small London garden, in which an aged sycamore—green in the early springtime, and therefore pleasant to the sight, not a little darkens the windows, which have also been further veiled with pale-pink muslin curtains. Clouds, too, have gathered in the sky, which but an hour before was so serenely blue. There is an oppression in the air as of a coming thunderstorm; and the silence which in the sombre half-light reigns in the small apartment has in it something weird and solemn. The husband

and wife are still, as I have before described them, standing, and on the countenances of both there is an expression of resolute defiance. The stillness which followed on Vinca's last reply has lasted but a minute, yet the pause has seemed long to the recently convalescent invalid, whose nerves are still weak, and who is, in truth, not by any means agreeably startled by the sudden display of courage and self-assertion on the part of her hitherto passive and adoring husband. The situation in which she finds herself is—she is well aware—one of considerable difficulty, and not a little management will, on her side, be required, in order that matters may be brought, as regards her conjugal arrangements, to a satisfactory conclusion. Although, owing in chief part to the reasons I have already given, her wifely feelings had become (even as Mrs. Brudenell had broadly hinted to Gerald might eventually be the case) so more than chilled that she had purposely, and with aforethought, made the fact of her alienation apparent to him, yet—now that the cruel deed is done—she feels half-alarmed for the possible consequences of her rashness. In silence she awaits the rejoinder to her last words, which she is well assured must come, as come it does, and that in the form of a question so direct that any farther hesitation on her part, together

with any announcement by her of contemplated rules for their mutual domestic guidance appears —for the present at least—totally out of the pale of consideration.

'Vinca!' thus he, in a surprisingly calm voice, commences his inquiries; 'I ask you once for all, whether you *ever* really loved me? I ask you whether, in the days gone by, all you looked, and said, and did, was nothing but a mere acted play? Say, did you perform those tricks for the sole and most noble purpose of entrapping the poor weak fool, whose ignorance *then* of the wiles of your deceitful, heartless sex must have seemed to you so laughable? Speak! answer me, I say,' he, with increasing vehemence, adds, whilst the lithe, nervous fingers are tightly clenched, and his frame quivers with the agitation which he strives in vain to master. 'Speak, and let us end for ever this vile game of cross purposes and pretence. Say, did you ever love me?'

These are searching questions, and the voice which utters them differs so entirely from the one which erst was Gerald's, that for a moment Vinca hesitates as to how best she can reply. Nothing can be farther from either her wish or purpose than an entire separation *a mensâ et thoro* from her husband. It is not in her interest to utterly exasperate him, but her temper is now

thoroughly aroused, and, moreover, her belief in the power of her own beauty is far too strong for her to doubt its influence over the man who is, poor fellow! as she has often contemptuously told herself, weak as a reed in her hands. It is this belief, one which a certain tremor in Gerald's tones as he utters his last words gives force to, that causes her to say, with a glance of insolent and sneering coquetry:

'Well, you have put the question crudely enough, and I have only to say that as I don't imagine many girls do love the men they marry, I can't see why I should be an exception to the rule. If a man cannot succeed in making his wife love him after marriage, why that, I suppose, is *his* fault, and then——'

'And then,' repeats Gerald, speaking loud and huskily, whilst his brain feels as though on fire, and his heart beats almost to suffocation. 'And then they had better, you would say, *part.* Good God!' he bursts forth after a moment's pause, during which the flames of passion, gaining strength by repression, defy all his efforts to control their force. 'If you did not in the old days love me, why in the name of Heaven did you marry me? So young, and' (taking a curiously lengthened survey of her face and person) 'so divinely beautiful, surely you need

not have been in such hot haste to find a victim! God! What a vile thing money is! It "separates chief friends," and brings together men and women who, but for its base influence, might have lived apart, peaceful and contented! Shall I tell you,' drawing up his powerful form, and speaking very sternly, 'in plain terms, why you deceived and married me? It was to escape from poverty, from debts, and from the lodging-house life you hated! It was to surround yourself with luxuries, to become, you fondly hoped, a woman of fashion, to dress in silk and velvet, and to buy, till their very profusion wearied you, wretched baubles such as this!' dashing, as he says the words (for in truth he has well-nigh ceased to be master of himself), a valuable old Dresden-framed mirror into the empty fireplace.

The action appears to produce a tranquillizing effect upon his nerves, for moving from the neighbourhood of the chimneypiece against which he had been leaning, and approaching Vinca, he says almost in his ordinary tones:

'I must apologize for my violence, my ill-breeding; but I was carried beyond myself. Shall we shake hands, Vinca?' suiting the action to the word, and extending his own towards her. 'I think it would be well to do so.'

Some moments are allowed to elapse before she

little Claudia's curls, and which has so excited her own surprise, has sprung from a stricken heart, and that it is with 'drops of salt' wrung from a strong man's mental agony that Gerald Mainwaring has given his little daughter the melancholy baptism of tears!

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